

## University of Groningen

### Souvenirs et découvertes

den Toonder, Jeanette

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# Canadian Literature / Littérature canadienne

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## A Quarterly of Criticism and Review

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NOTE: "Letters," a space for posting responses to material published in *Canadian Literature* is now available on our website. Also available is an online searchable index for all previous issues of *Canadian Literature* from 1959 to 2005. This more efficient and user-friendly online index will replace the paper supplemental index we have published in previous years.

# Playing the Monster Blind?

## The Practical Limitations of Updating the Canadian Canon<sup>1</sup>

*Laura Moss*

**L**ynn Coady's story "Play the Monster Blind" has roughly 11,200 words. To my mind, it is one of the best short stories recently published. However, in the anthology of Canadian literature I am currently co-editing with Cynthia Sugars, we seriously have to ask if we have 28 printed pages for this short story. Is it worth 2.3 % of our total allotted pages? Does the story compose 1/43rd of the Canadian canon we want to represent? Coady's "Big Dog Rage" is only 12 pages. Does that make it a better story for the anthology? If Coady is in, who is out? Bliss Carman or SKY Lee? Or both? Or neither? What is the provenance of the most highly canonized works? How organic is Canadian literature, really? Looking at the pragmatics of creating a Canadian literature anthology leads me to consider the practical limitations of canon formation.

Further, what kind of narrative about Canadian literature do I want to teach in a 13-week course? Do I want to provide a historical overview (from the explorers to now), or focus in depth on an important issue (from globalization to food), or theoretical approach (from feminism to postcolonialism)? Why are some books taught more than others and should I teach them too? What changes have taken place in pedagogical approaches to Canadian literature and how might they help my teaching? Do they affect the books I choose to teach? What should be on graduate student comprehensive exam lists? Is there a canon I think the students should know? Am I being responsible to the rich history of Canadian literature if a student I work with hasn't read Susanna Moodie, A.J.M Smith, Don McKay, or Joy Kogawa when he



graduates? How much does literary history play a part in the literary future? These are the questions I ask myself all the time. In thinking about the institutions of Canadian literature, I think it vital that we pause to reflect on some of the realities of everyday canon formation.

I am aware that I am a bit late to the game and that the canon debates (involving Robert Lecker, Tracy Ware, Frank Davey, Carole Gerson, Barbara Godard, Imre Szeman) are fashionably “over.” However, since I subscribe to the truism that canons are always in process, I don’t think the discussion can or should ever be complete. Ideally, a canon should reflect the current literary, social, and theoretical climates of the field. I agree with Lecker’s position when he says “canons serve to facilitate debate, encourage change, and force those addressing literary and social issues to take responsibility for their positions, no matter how subversive or self-serving.” I also agree with Lynn Bloom who argues that “a canon may be seen as a map of the territory it encompasses” rather than with the notion that canons are the “best” of what has been thought and said in the world. So, if a canon is a map of territory, where are we trying to get? How do we get there?

In the preface to his 2004 edition of *A History of Canadian Literature*, W.H. New remarks on how much has changed in Canadian literature since the first edition of his *History* was published in 1987: “new literary voices are also being heard; the sheer number of publications has increased manifold; technological changes have altered both the manner of literary production and the patterns and methods of dissemination; and such issues as ethnicity, ecology, economics, social status, gender, copyright, and sexuality all vie for further attention.” How do we map the new literary voices New is speaking of? How do we wade through the number of publications, the changing forms of production, and the increasing emphasis on prizes and expanded global markets? How do we balance the varieties of issues that vie for attention?

How do we reconcile books as commodities/products with our literary specialists’ mission to take them seriously as art and as indicators of culture and community? My questions here arise out of some observations I’ve made over the past few years as a literary consumer, a Canadianist, and a postcolonialist, an anthologist creating a product, a teacher teaching in a public institution, an editor of a journal that needs to keep subscription rates up, and a researcher at a research focused institution. I have shifted from concentrating on the more ideologically driven concerns about inclusion and exclusion to considering the more mundane, yet powerful, practicalities of marketing, reviewing, anthologizing, and teaching of recent Canadian

literature. The possibilities of canonical expansion are at least in part governed by the sheer volume of work published, publishers' restrictions on page lengths, permissions drawbacks, and a lack of time for any one critic. So, the limitations arise in temporal and economic factors. It is not, as I once thought, all political. Or, time and money are political, just differently political than I had realized before being faced with hundreds of books for review or courses to be taught within existing frameworks.

The single most revealing contributor to my own shifting consideration of canons in Canada has been becoming a reviews editor at *Canadian Literature*. I now see how much work is being published in Canada today and how hard it is to stay on top of it all. I hear colleagues remembering the old days when one could realistically expect to read everything published about Canadian literature. Those days are gone. Over the last few years, *Canadian Literature* has gone from publishing reviews of approximately 200 books a year to 2004's total of reviews on over 500 books of fiction, poetry, drama, theory, and criticism. Part of the increase has come from an editorial decision to expand the types of books *Canadian Literature* is interested in (for instance, we now seek reviews on works of literary theory even if they are not specifically about Canadian subjects). However, the lion's share of the increase comes from our attempt at keeping up on reviewing at least a reasonable cross section of books produced/ordered/received. Yet, we are still not reviewing many works that come out. With a limited number of qualified reviewers, space limitations in the journal itself, and a lack of time for the editors (we don't get a stipend or a course release for working on the journal), it is difficult to do just that.

So, what gets reviewed and why? In the past, before I started to work for *Canadian Literature*, I had thought that the choice of which books to review was an ideological decision delineating what is the best work, what is the most representative of contemporary climates, and what vision of Canadian literature the journal wanted to project. With experience, I realize that while some of these certainly hold, the truth of the matter more often lies in the practicalities. Some books go through requests for reviews from five separate people (and many months) before someone agrees to do a review. If no one is willing or able, sometimes a book that deserves to be reviewed gets shelved. First novels more rarely get reviewed because of the lack of recognition of the author by the review editors or by potential reviewers who do not want to spend their time on an unknown quantity. It is easier to find a reviewer for a prizewinner than not. It is infinitely easier to find a reviewer for a new

Margaret Atwood novel than a collection of short stories by a previously unpublished writer.

Then there is the question of who writes the reviews. The lack of prestige in writing reviews, where they count little for tenure, for instance, limits the number of younger faculty willing to do reviews and places a burden on them if they do. Those who agree to write reviews consistently tend to be the more senior academics or graduate students. As critics (and reviewers), we are in a position of immense responsibility to the field but we need to recognize that with such responsibility there is an arbitrariness that can not be avoided.

In a recent job search, I asked all the candidates the same question: what are five texts that you think that a graduate student specializing in Canadian literature should be aware of before graduating? Note that I wasn't asking anyone to name the top five Canadian novels, or to define a canon, but what is important to know. I didn't specify that the list had to be fiction, poetry, or theory. I left it open. The responses were fascinating: one woman angrily told me that she would not answer because she spent so much time deconstructing the canon that she wasn't going to build it back up for me. Most people named five works of fiction; most were post-1970s; some were chronologically distributed. Few responses were innovative or theory focused. What became evident was that most people thought this was a trick question: a construct-the-canon game. My question was actually a precursor to very practical questions about working in an institution: about comprehensive exam structures and lists, candidacy papers, undergraduate course offerings (should a student in a senior class in Canadian literature be assumed to have any specific knowledge from having taken "Introduction to Canadian Literature"), and future developments of current course offerings. While these considerations are on some level ideological, they also have to do with the practicalities of balancing a plethora of on-going and working canons. This anecdote reminds that you can't, and shouldn't, untangle the practical concerns from the ideological ones. They are both important in the day-to-day workings of a department and a culture.

Writers who live off of their art have long understood the interwoven nature of art and practical considerations. I close with the words of Sinclair Ross, written in a letter to my father in response to an invitation to attend a symposium in his honour at Sir George Williams/Concordia University. While I don't want to quantify success, relevance, or value, it is important to keep Ross' practical terms in mind while considering ever evolving canon-formation.

Apartado 258  
Malaga, Spain  
December 2, 1975

Dear John:

You no doubt think me ungrateful, but far from it. In fact, the generosity of what you suggest overwhelms me. But apart from being a colorless old man with a poor voice who would not help things along, I don't measure up. A two-day symposium in my honour, everybody saying what a fine writer I am, while all the time, in what we might say "practical terms," I am such a dud! Sawbones Memorial, despite a number of favorable reviews, has sold 2,600 copies: Whir of Gold, 1,100. I have never been translated; apart from 3 short stories on TV, I have never been filmed. I'm not complaining; I have my own reservations about Ross: but what I would hear in Montreal, with the "facts" of my literary career staring me in the face, would have a hollow ring.

. . . It's late; next month I'll be 68. At the moment I am at work on a sequel to Sawbones, but not, I'm afraid, with much enthusiasm. Even if it stands up as a novel—and at this stage, revising, I'm not at all sure—McClellands will no doubt think of those 2,600 copies and be wary. Revising, of course, is a depressing chore, and later I may feel the urge to scribble at something else; but right now I'm ready to call it a day and for the rest of time left me try to relax and enjoy myself. Some make it; some don't. There's no use pretending. At least I can give myself an A for effort.

My warmest thanks for your effort. And I'm sorry.

Sincerely,

Jim.

[Sinclair Ross]

NOTE

- 1 A version of this editorial was presented at the joint Simon Fraser University / University of Guelph "TransCanada: Literature. Institutions. Citizenship" Conference, held in Vancouver, June 2005.

## Lake Superior

Somewhere on the long drive north we stopped  
The car and walked out on the lake, the air  
So cold our lungs were breathing flames, and stepped  
Into the sloping planes of ice the ire

Of some huge fist had smashed to shards the size  
Of sails, archaic hills of rock outthrust  
Into the lake beneath the fierce blue sky,  
And behind us dark infinity of forest.

I turned around. You'd vanished in the snow  
Behind some slab of ice. That's when I knew

Our lives depended on our waiting car,  
We ill-clothed animals in the perfect cold  
Of nature's incapacity to care.  
If I could speak, what god should I have called?

# There's Got to Be Some Wrenching and Slashing: Horror and Retrospection in Alice Munro's "Fits"

In the introduction to her *Selected Stories*, Alice Munro mentions that she does not read stories chronologically:

A story is not a road to follow . . . it's more like a house. You go inside and stay there for a while, wandering back and forth and settling where you like and discovering how the room and corridors relate to each other, how the world outside is altered by being viewed from those windows. And you, the visitor, the reader, are altered as well by being in this enclosed space . . . You can go back again and again, and the house, the story, always contains more than you saw the last time. (xvi-xvii)

This idea of the text as house reveals many of the complicated workings within Munro's own stories. A house is an image of containment, something difficult to penetrate from the outside; however, Munro emphasizes the inability of a house to contain. Even within the metaphorical story-as-house, there is no stasis: the reader's perception of the house changes depending on shifting perspectives. Moreover, boundaries between inside and outside blur: Munro implies that the reader herself is changed inside the story. Munro's analysis of the story as a house is followed by a passage from Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, that discloses the sinister side of fiction:

*But mark, madam, we live amongst riddles and mysteries—the most obvious things, which come in our way, have dark sides, which the quickest sight cannot penetrate into; and even the clearest and most exalted understandings amongst us find ourselves puzzled and at a loss in almost every cranny of nature's works.* (xvii)

The relation between dark riddles and reader detection features in what is arguably one of Munro's most eerie stories in *The Progress of Love*, "Fits." If Munro's fiction is a house, what kind of house is "Fits?" Because it is structured around the horrific event of the Weebles' murder-suicide and Peg Kuiper's discovery of the bodies—a gory event which occurs in the middle of her otherwise banal existence in the small town of Gilmore—"Fits" could be a haunted house, a gothic house of horrors, full of uncanny secrets and shifting spaces.

In their book, *Gothic and the Comic Turn*, Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik argue that too much critical attention has been paid to unearthing in gothic fiction that which lies beneath the uncanny and that not enough attention has been paid to the surface effects themselves (2-3). In the field of Munro criticism, however, people tend to pay attention either to surface effects or to that which lies beneath the uncanny, but very few discuss the relation *between* surface effects and the uncanny.<sup>1</sup> I argue that "Fits" intricately connects the surface effect—Munro's use of retrospection—with the horrific *affect*. The narrative's shifting spaces and perspectives provide cinematic effect, but they also produce a certain affect in the reader, akin to the affect produced by contemporary horror film. According to Isabel Pinedo,

The universe of the contemporary horror film is an uncertain one in which good and evil, normality and abnormality, reality and illusion become virtually indistinguishable. This, together with the presentation of violence as constituent feature of everyday life, the inefficacy of human action, and the refusal of narrative closure produces an unstable paranoid universe in which familiar categories collapse. (9)

The world of "Fits" is similarly uncertain: violence is inserted into the everyday and—for the characters within the story and for readers outside of it—categories collapse and the familiar becomes unfamiliar. The insertion of humorous elements into an otherwise gruesome tale, one of the most compelling facets of "Fits," exemplifies the collapse of categories.<sup>2</sup>

The horrific affect produced by "Fits" is particularly unsettling because the horror disrupts the most intimate of spaces: the home. Before their marriage, Robert aligned Peg with her house and imagined her entire life contained there: "Back in Toronto, he had thought of Peg living in this house. He had thought of her patterned, limited, serious, and desirable life" (150). We are specifically told that the house in the story is Peg's; Peg owned the house before her marriage to Robert. After they wed, Robert wanted to

buy another house, and offered to do so, but Peg refused (149). This house suggests order and containment; in fact, Peg herself personifies these qualities for Robert:

Robert once told her he had never met anyone so self-contained as she was.

. . . Peg said she didn't know what he meant.

He started to explain what a self-contained person was like. At that time, he had a very faulty comprehension of Gilmore vocabulary—he could still make mistakes about it—and he took too seriously the limits that were usually observed in daily exchanges.

"I know what the words mean," Peg said, smiling, "I just don't understand how you mean it about me." (147)

Significantly Robert imposes the idea of containment on Peg here because he believes that Peg's containment is endearing and desirable. But his inability either to penetrate the female, domestic space when he wishes or to control its excess ultimately haunts Robert and reveals what Susanne Becker says is a recurring theme in Munro's gothic fiction: the disruption of female containment within the domestic sphere (114). This passage especially points to the misunderstanding that exists even in the early stages of the relationship and Robert's lack of desire to resolve it. Peg neither comprehends, nor likely subscribes to Robert's vision of her containment, and the disruption of his vision leads to uncanny moments.<sup>3</sup>

Freud's use of *unheimlich* to describe the uncanny suggests the way in which every home has the potential to be unhomey. According to Freud, "the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (220). Freud applies Schelling's definition of the *unheimlich* as "*the name for everything that ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light*" (224). Freud says that the terms *heimlich* and *unheimlich* were originally understood in opposition to each other, but that they have converged to the point where they cannot be understood separately. The uncanny affect, for Freud, is implicitly linked to the process of repression and repetition. He says that this link between repression and the uncanny accounts for the convergence between the terms *heimlich* and *unheimlich*: "we can understand why linguistic usage has extended *das Heimliche* into its opposite, *das Unheimliche* . . . for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (241). Such doubling and repetition is crucial to creating the uncanny in "Fits."



Domestic space itself is the first thing to be doubled in “Fits,” as we discover that the Weebles’ house, where the murder-suicide takes place, is eerily similar to Peg and Robert’s house:

The houses on the street were originally of only three designs. But by now most of them had been so altered, with new windows, porches, wings, and decks, that it was hard to find true mates anymore. The Weebles’ house had been built as a mirror image of the Kuipers’, but the front window had been changed, its Christmas-card panes taken out, and the roof had been lifted. (151)

Even more disturbing, not just the architecture of these two houses seems to be mirrored: as the story unfolds, the internal events of the Kuiper household begin to resemble the Weebles’. Hints of past marital discord, and perhaps even abuse, build to the point that they cause uncanny moments when the repressed threatens to be revealed, such as when the Kuipers are sitting around their kitchen discussing Peg’s discovery of the Weebles’ corpses. Delighting in this discussion, Peg’s son from her previous marriage announces, “When you and Dad used to have those fights? . . . When you used to have those fights, you know what I used to think? I used to think one of you was going to come and kill me with a knife” (170). Such statements pose a constant threat of rupture as the houses of the past contain secrets that could be unearthed and disrupt the domestic stability of the present. Robert wants to believe that violent ruptures are freakish—he wishes to distance himself from them—but the more he tries to create distance between his family and violence, the closer and more everyday violence begins to seem. Referring to the murder-suicide, Robert declares, “What this is like . . . it’s like an earthquake or a volcano. It’s that kind of happening. It’s a kind of fit. People can take a fit like the earth takes a fit. But it only happens once in a long while. It’s a freak occurrence” (171). The exchange that ensues between Robert and Clayton, however, is telling:

“Earthquakes and volcanoes aren’t freaks,” said Clayton, with a certain dry pleasure. “If you want to call that a fit, you’d have to call it a periodic fit. Such as people have, married people have.”

“We don’t,” said Robert. He looked at Peg as if waiting for her to agree with him.

But Peg was looking at Clayton. She who always seemed pale and silky and assenting, but hard to follow as a watermark in fine paper, looked dried out, chalky, her outlines fixed in steady, helpless, unapologetic pain.

“No,” said Clayton. “No, not you.” (171)

Virginia Pruitt argues that this exchange reveals the “essentially benevolent character of Peg and Robert’s intimacy” and that Clayton “unequivocally

agrees” with Robert’s assertion that he and Peg do not have fits (165).<sup>4</sup> I would argue just the opposite: that the hesitancy expressed by Clayton’s repetitive “no” indicates that violence might not be so extraordinary, and that at any moment the ordinary might split open and erupt into violence.<sup>5</sup>

In the uncomfortable convergence between the ordinary and the extraordinary, things rise up from below the surface of Robert’s consciousness. The home becomes unhomely when memories that Robert has tried to repress come back to him. He recalls, for instance, his former relationship with a married woman named Lee, where feelings quickly devolved from love to loathing. A perfectly banal (and notably domestic) conversation about whether or not silverware should be monogrammed precipitates the final confrontation between Robert and Lee:

They were having an argument about whether it was permissible, or sickening, to have your family initial on your silverware. All of a sudden, the argument split open—Robert couldn’t remember how, but it split open, and they found themselves saying the cruellest things to each other that they could imagine. Their voices changed from the raised pitch and speed of argument, and they spoke quietly and with subtle loathing. (172)

The argument quickly turns sadomasochistic, as words become a form of pleasurable violence. Particularly disturbing is just how close affectionate proclamations are to hateful ones, and how quickly Robert and Lee’s perceptions of each other change:

They laughed in recognition of their extremity, just as they might have laughed at another time, in the middle of quite different, astoundingly tender declarations. They trembled with murderous pleasure, with the excitement of saying what could never be retracted; they exulted in wounds inflicted but also in wounds received, and one or the other said at some point, “This is the first time we’ve spoken the truth since we’ve known each other!” (173-174)

Robert has a desire to repress and forget this confrontation. Speaking of past relationships, he tells Peg, “There are things I just absolutely and eternally want to forget about” (174). Yet he is disturbed by the realization that if he has repressed details of his previous relationships, in all likelihood so has Peg. Considering the story that she told him of her ex-husband’s leaving, Robert thinks,

A man doesn’t just drive farther and farther away in his trucks until he disappears from his wife’s view. Not even if he has always dreamed of the Arctic. Things happen before he goes. Marriage knots aren’t going to slip apart painlessly, with the pull of distance. There’s got to be some wrenching and slashing. But she didn’t say, and he didn’t ask, or even think much about that, till now. (175)

Robert cannot help but make uncomfortable connections between these relationships and his own relationship with Peg, and he must confront the possibility that potential for violence hides in every relationship.

After the Kuipers' murder-suicide, Robert discovers the potential for violence to spread from one home to another. Munro makes no attempt to confine the violence or the bloodiness to the scene of the crime; on the contrary, as Robert cannot help but notice when he looks at Peg's coat, blood seems to have spread everywhere:

He looked at Peg's lilac colored coat hanging beside Karen's red coat on the washroom door. On the lilac coat there was a long crusty smear of reddish-brown paint, down to the hemline.

Of course that wasn't paint. But on her coat? How did she get blood on her coat? She must have brushed up against them in that room. She must have got close.

Then he remembered the talk in the diner, and realized she wouldn't have needed to get that close. She could have got blood from the door frame. The constable had been in the diner, and he said there was blood everywhere, and not just blood. (159)

The most unsettling thing is that blood has entered the Kuiper home and become part of their everyday experience, which disrupts Robert's perception that their home is immune to violence.

Pinedo contends that in contemporary horror films, violence is "constituent of everyday life" (18) and that "disruption takes the form of physical violence against the body. . . . Gore—the explicit depiction of dismemberment, evisceration, putrefaction, and myriad other forms of boundary violations with copious amounts of blood—takes center stage" (18). In "Fits" blood and gore are central. In a sense the Kuipers—especially the children—revel in the description of the violent events. When they sit down to dinner the day that Peg discovers the bodies, her sons harass her for more explicit details:

"So was there?" Kevin said. "Was there blood and guck all over?"

"Ghoul," said Clayton.

"Those were human beings, Kevin," Robert said.

"Were," said Kevin. "I know they were human beings, I mixed their drinks on Boxing Day. She drank gin and he drank rye. They were human beings then, but all they are now is chemicals. Mom? What did you see first? Shanna said there was blood and guck even out in the hallway."

"He's brutalized from all the TV he watches," Clayton said. "He thinks it was some video. He can't tell real blood from video blood."

"Mom? Was it splashed?" (167)

For readers as well as for the Kuiper kids, the Weebles are not really people; they have been transformed into a story, a spectacle for our viewing pleasure. However, what we *do not* see turns out to be particularly significant.

The fragmented shifts in Munro's narrative put the reader in the position of one who looks at the spectacle, yet the retrospective gaze of the narrative puts us further away from that which we most desire and dread to see: the Weebles' bodies. The shifting narrative perspective operates cinematically, mirroring Pinedo's description of horror films. She says that although film privileges the act of showing, what is not shown is equally important and that being unable to see structures the act of looking (51). Employing Dennis Giles' argument, she shows that "The pleasure of recreational terror depends on the tension between not (fully) seeing, the pleasure of recoil, and seeing (more fully), the pleasure of the gaze" (54). Ultimately, however, "Fits" resists the gaze of the reader.

Munro creates a distance between the reader and the story, and frustrates the reader's gaze, through complex retrospective narration. It is Robert who pictures Peg's discovering the Weebles' bodies. Robert is most aptly described as the *focalizer* of the story because, as Mieke Bal argues, the term "point of view" "do[es] not make an explicit distinction between, on the one hand, the vision through which the elements are presented and, on the other, the identity of the voice that is verbalizing the vision" (100-101). *Focalization* thus refers to "the relationship between the 'vision,' the agent that sees, and that which is seen" (Bal, 104). This distinction is crucial in "Fits," because, as readers, we can view events only through Robert's recounting. As a result, we tend to take Robert's story at face value; indeed, according to Bal, "If the focalizer coincides with the character, that character will have a technical advantage over the other characters. The reader watches with the character's eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character" (104).<sup>6</sup> Yet in "Fits," although we might trust Robert's vision at first, we quickly realize that his vision, and consequently his version of the story, is flawed. What we encounter are several layers of memory; Robert gives a retrospective commentary on second-hand versions of events: "He pictured what happened. First from the constable's report, then from Peg's" (151). His own version can only be a fragmentary piecing together of these accounts, and so Robert finds himself in the role of detective. In his work on detective and anti-detective fiction, Stefano Tani foregrounds the impossibility of the detective ever fully piecing together the past: "The detective is a scientist, but a particular kind of scientist . . . an archaeologist. In fact both

the detective and the archaeologist ‘dig out,’ and their reconstruction is only partial, limited to what is *left after* (after the end of a civilization, after a murder)” (47). Nevertheless, the detective still wants to establish some certainty in his or her understanding of what happened *before* and *during* the murder.

Part of Robert’s difficulty in establishing what happened *before* the murder is related to his lack of understanding of Gilmore. As Ildikó de Papp Carrington astutely notes, “[T]he ‘many abominable details’ of what Peg must have seen in the Weebles’ bedroom are *doubly* distanced by being filtered through the point of view of an outsider and a second-hand observer, a witness who observes not the murder scene itself but only the bloodstained observer returned from that scene (130)” (52). Carrington goes on to argue that “The repetition of the word *watching* [throughout the story] emphasizes Robert’s role as a third-person observer” (52). The distinct tension between the language of certainty and the language of uncertainty in Robert’s narrative demonstrates that in addition to being an outsider, he is also an imperfect observer. The proliferation of various forms of the verb “to know” suggest that Robert does *not* know. His narrative vacillates between definite language—“She didn’t call; she didn’t halt again” (154)—and tentative language—“*Perhaps* they’d got up a while ago” (153); “She *must* have known then or she *would* have called” (154 emphasis added). And in the middle of the narrative we are told that not only is Robert receiving a version of events that is full of gaps, but his memory of what he has been told is faulty:

She set the eggs on the clothes dryer, and was going to leave them there. Then she thought she had better take them up into the kitchen, in case the Weebles wanted eggs for breakfast and had run out. They wouldn’t think of looking in the utility room.

(This, in fact, was Robert’s explanation to himself. She didn’t say all that, but he forgot she didn’t. She just said, ‘I thought I might as well take them up to the kitchen.’) (152)

That the third-person parenthetical voice interjects to tell us of Robert’s flawed memory adds another filter to the narrative.

Some of the editorial changes made between the version of “Fits” that was published in *Grand Street* and the final version that appeared in *The Progress of Love* accentuate Robert’s role as a faulty detective. For example, in the first version, Robert notices that the Weebles’ car is in the carport with snow in front of it, from which he infers that, “They couldn’t have been out last night. Unless they were walking. The sidewalks were not cleared, except along the main street and the school streets, and it was difficult to

walk along the narrowed streets with their banks of snow, but, being new to town, they might have set out not realizing that" (*Grand Street*, 41). In the first version, the paragraph—and Robert's insight—ends there. In the new version, however, Munro adds the line, "He didn't look closely enough to see if there were footprints" (*The Progress of Love* 151), which suggests that Robert is a person who does not notice things—as we see from the rest of the story, he *never* looks closely enough—and also questions the accuracy of Robert's perception.

Munro makes another crucial change in a paragraph where, as I have already noted, Robert associates his failed relationship with Lee to Peg's failed first marriage. In the first version, Robert realizes that a marriage does not fall apart easily, and he thinks, "There's got to be some wrenching and slashing" (59). In the second version, Munro adds, "But she didn't say, and he didn't ask, or even think much about that, till now" (175). This additional phrase suggests that Robert has continued the "errors of avoidance" (174) he committed in previous relationships in his current marriage with Peg. If any epiphany is promised by the phrase "till now," the rest of the story will frustrate that promise: Robert is a man who does not look closely enough to see footprints in the snow and who does not get close enough to people to really understand them. If our knowledge of characters and events depends on Robert's faulty knowledge and flawed perception, the question then becomes, how can readers know anything for certain?<sup>7</sup>

By constantly forcing us to interpret and reinterpret the shifting perspective of Robert—the flawed detective—Munro positions the reader as a detective who is starving for knowledge of the horrific events in the story. Our own delight in piecing together clues is matched within the story itself, as the people of Gilmore take pleasure both in trying to solve the mystery of the Weebles and in spreading the terrible news of the Weebles' deaths. The pleasure taken here might even be described as a kind of *schadenfreude*. People have an insatiable desire to know the gruesome details. As Robert relates, mingled with this pleasure in knowing and spreading the news of the Weebles' tragedy is the idea that to lack knowledge of the sensational event is almost shameful:

It was true that people valued and looked forward to the moment of breaking the news . . . but there was real kindness and consideration behind this impulse, as well . . . Nobody would want not to know. To go out into the street, not knowing. To go around doing all the usual daily things, not knowing. He felt himself troubled, even slightly humiliated, to think that he hadn't known; Peg hadn't let him know. (160)

Once people learn (or *think* they have learned) all the details of the story, they want an explanation. Here Munro plays with the concept of reason: people want to find a fixed, rational cause for the murder-suicide. And in the absence of finding a reason, people invent: "Then reasons. The talk turned to reasons. Naturally. There had been no theories put forward in the diner. Nobody knew the reason, nobody could imagine. But by the end of the afternoon there were too many explanations to choose from" (161). As Pinedo points out, however, the contemporary horror genre destroys reason itself: it eradicates rationality, coherence and temporality (17). In fact, Pinedo says, "Postmodern horror confronts us with the necessity for an epistemology of uncertainty: we only know that we do not know" (29). Similarly, Tani points to the counter-intuitive nature of the postmodern manifestation of the detective novel; because it resists a solution, Tani refers to the postmodern detective novel as *anti-detective*: "The main difference that separates postmodernism from modernism, then, is postmodernism's lack of a center, its refusal to posit a unifying system. Postmodernism's new awareness is the absence of a finality, a solution. This is exactly what the anti-detective novel is about" (39-40).<sup>8</sup> Because the story of the Weebles resists solution, the Gilmore locals have an almost violent curiosity to find one. Observing the townspeople driving by the Weebles' house in search of spectacle, Robert associates the spectators with a monster: "Inside those cars were just the same people, probably the very same people, he had been talking to during the afternoon. But now they seemed joined to their cars, making some new kind of monster that came poking around in a brutally curious way" (171). As readers, we are drawn in—and even implicated—in this violent curiosity. We are forced to project meaning into the gaps in the story, and, like the people of Gilmore, we take pleasure in imagining the spectacle of the Weebles' dead bodies. (And it is not just the dead bodies that we take pleasure in imagining.)

In addition to our frustrated curiosity, the humorous elements provide yet another source of reader pleasure *and* discomfort. Munro's irony is enjoyable because it allows us to feel as if we possess knowledge that some or all of the characters in the story do not share. For instance, after Peg discovers the Weebles' remains, she goes to work at the store, where she is greeted by Karen's proclamation, "It's too cold. If there was any wind, it'd be murder" (156). This statement, although somewhat heavy-handed, leaves the reader with a snicker of delight, because we know there has been a murder. Robert's speculation about the cause of the murder-suicide is a source of

further irony. After considering and dismissing various possibilities, the narrator says, “(Robert was right about the reasons. In Gilmore everything becomes known, sooner or later. Secrecy and confidentiality are seen to be against the public interest. There is a network of people who are married to or related to the people who work in offices where all the records are kept. . . .)” (164-165). Here, we read the parenthetical voice as ironic, because, as we learn from the Weebles’ funeral, everything in Gilmore *does not* become known, least of all the reasons for the tragedy:

( . . . At the funeral on Thursday, the United Church minister . . . spoke about the pressures and tensions of modern life but gave no more specific clues. Some people were disappointed, as if they expected him to do that—or thought that he might at least mention the dangers of falling away from faith and church membership, the sin of despair. Other people thought that saying anything more than he did say would have been in bad taste.) (165)

Although allowed a self-satisfied laugh at the characters, the reader is also implicated in this scene. Like the people of Gilmore, we are being teased about our own curiosity.

Munro also teases her readers with provocative details such as having Peg serve her family a spaghetti-and-tomato-sauce dinner on the same day that she discovers the bodies. We relish such details for their black humour: after all, it is hard not to chuckle when making the gory and gross connection between the “blood and guck all over” (167) and the image of noodles with red sauce. Particularly amusing is the exchange between Peg and Kevin, where he tries to convince her that he can just eat dinner “in bed” and Peg replies “Not spaghetti, you can’t” (168). Ending the paragraph as it does and juxtaposed with Kevin’s question earlier in the paragraph about the Weebles’ blood, “Mom? Was it splashed?” (167), this phrase sounds strangely foreboding and incites us to read meaning into Peg’s choice of food. Although Hanly warns us that “modern writers, after Freud, are at liberty to play jokes on us as never before” (170), even he is tempted to read “her choice of menu for the evening meal” as a sign of denial (169). Hanly’s reading is tempting and plausible; however, I would suggest that it is just as probable that Peg’s choice of dinner menu is coincidental and only takes on significance through our own retrospective piecing together of events. Munro may also be playing with us by dropping such tantalizing clues and Freudian red herrings. To modify Freud: sometimes a noodle is just a noodle.<sup>9</sup>

Another striking example of Munro’s playfulness and her use of black humour, is that the murderer’s name is Walter Weeble. Besides the alliteration



and the name's absolute banality—it does not, for example, have the distinctive ring of a name like Hannibal Lecter—is the name's association with the Weeble toy. According to “The Vintage Toy Encyclopedia” website, the Weebles are a Hasbro toy from the 1950s, which were originally based on the punching bag clown from the children's TV Show “Romper Room.” Their original manifestation was as a family of four, but they have experienced several resurgences in popularity and their form has changed with each resurgence. What has remained consistent, however, is the shape of the toy: the Weebles are round and egg-shaped with heavy bottoms. The popular advertising slogan is “Weebles wobble but they don't fall down.” But of course, as we know, the Weebles in “Fits” *do* fall down, and in a pretty gruesome way. The description of Walter and Nora Weeble in this story is very Weeble-like. These characters are first introduced without names; all we know is that “The two people who died were in their early sixties. They were both tall and well built, and carried a few pounds of extra weight. He was gray-haired, with a square, rather flat face” (143). Two pages later, when we are actually provided with their name, they are associated with eggs and it is the egg lady who first speaks their name. Also, the accidental discovery of the Weebles' bodies is precipitated by Peg's delivering their eggs. Throughout the story, in fact, we keep seeing images of the Weebles' eggs.

The final confrontation between Robert and Lee again forces the reader to make the disturbing and comic connection between sex and violence, which has been building since the beginning of the story, when the Weebles narrated their tale of the sacrificial virgins in the Yucatan. After Robert and Lee's heated argument, we are told that they begin to laugh uncontrollably: “It wasn't so far from laughing to making love, which they did, all with no retraction. Robert made barking noises, as a dog should, and nuzzled Lee in a bruising way, snapping with real appetite at her flesh. Afterward they were enormously and finally sick of each other but no longer disposed to blame” (174). In this instance, laughter becomes a way to defuse the tension between them, and maybe even prevent the argument from escalating to any sort of physical violence.

Perhaps a more shocking example of black humour takes place during the public discussion of the Weebles' deaths in the local diner. As the locals contemplate the way that Walter Weeble killed his wife and himself, and the mess that resulted, one of the men says, “He shouldn't ever have used a shotgun for that kind of business,” and another replies, “Maybe a shotgun was all he had” (159-160). Although it provokes a feeling of discomfort in

the reader, this comment also provides comic relief. The insertion of humour into the horror genre is not all that unusual. Pinedo argues that "Comedy serves a double, paradoxical function in horror films; it creates both distance and proximity. Most notably, it produces the proverbial comic relief, the cessation of terror, thus providing the requisite *distance* to stave off terrorism at strategic points" (46). Comedy and terror must be in a constant tension with each other, maintains Pinedo, because too much proximity causes terrorism and too much distance causes parody (46).<sup>10</sup>

Munro complicates this relationship between distance and proximity through the shifting and layering of perspective. As Bennett and Brown argue, "in a fictional universe in which the humdrum-looking daily world may actually be one of 'deep caves paved with linoleum,' nothing is 'just the way it looks on the surface'" (194). What is perfectly ordinary can, depending on perception, seem terrifying, as even the most ordinary things become unreliable. The power of shifting perception is illustrated when Robert leaves the Kuipers' house to contemplate Peg's story of the murder-suicide. As he walks through the landscape, he has an uncanny moment, in which the familiar becomes strange and then familiar again (177). For the first time in the story, Robert does not shy away from proximity or from looking closely, and he is surprised by "how close he had to get before he saw that what amazed and bewildered him so was nothing but old wrecks" (177). Here, it is proximity that causes relief: Robert feels like laughing when he discovers that it is just his own imagination, rather than the objects in front of him, that causes his distress (177).

Although Robert is willing to get close enough to "old wrecks" to figure out what it is about them that scares him, he seems unable, or unwilling, to get as intimately acquainted with Peg. Pruitt, however, claims that "For Peg and Robert, a greater rather than a lesser degree of intimacy seems the outcome of the 'secrets and mystery' explicated throughout the story" (166). In reaching this neat and tidy conclusion, Pruitt focuses on the line, "Now he felt more like going home" (177), which seems to indicate that Robert has reached some kind of inner peace. Neither the story nor Robert's thought process ends with this line, however. "Fits" resists closure as we see how Peg's version of the story—"I knew there wasn't anybody but me alive in the house. Then I saw his leg, I saw his leg stretched out in the hall, and I knew then, but I had to go on in and make sure" (169)—conflicts with the version of events that Robert remembers the constable recounting:

At noon, when the constable in the diner was giving his account, he had described how the force of the shot threw Walter Weeble backward. "It blasted him part-ways out of the room. His head was laying out in the hall. What was left of it was laying out in the hall."

Not a leg. Not the indicative leg, whole and decent in its trousers, the shod foot. That was not what anybody turning at the top of the stairs would see and would have to step over, step through, in order to go into the bedroom and look at the rest of what was there. (178)

Readers are unable to feel any sort of cathartic purging: we are left on the verge of uncertainty. Left with only a partial vision of the events, we are unable to reconstruct the very incidents which would enable us to come up with a solution. We are left with a host of conjectures: Did the constable get the story wrong? Did Robert misinterpret the constable's story? Is Robert's faulty memory acting up again? Did Peg either participate in the murder or do something strange and gory with the bodies? Did Peg touch the bodies? If so, why? Because we have access only to unreliable fragments of the past, we can never know and again find ourselves in the position of the thwarted detective.

Most critics identify an important relation between time and the detective genre. Tani argues,

The traditional detective novel presents a reconstruction of the past and ends when this reconstruction has been fulfilled. To reconstruct the past is to go back to a point (the one of the crime) about which the detective is concerned. There must a fixed point; otherwise the regression in time would be infinite. So to go back in time is equal to finding a criminal, to unraveling a mystery. (45)

The crucial difference between the traditional detective novel and the anti-detective novel, says Tani, is that the anti-detective novel fails to provide the reader with the access to the past that he or she would need to solve the mystery: "By contrast, in the deconstructive anti-detective novel, the inanity of discovery is brought to its climax in the nonsolution, which unmasks a tendency toward disorder and irrationality that has always been implicit within detective fiction" (46). Bennett and Brown maintain that the distorted sense of time in Munro's stories resists ordering: "it is much harder to restore order when time is as dazzlingly disordered as it is in many Munro stories" (190). With its layered, schizophrenic sense of time, "Fits" perfectly exemplifies the anti-detective fiction that leaves us feeling as if the world is a disordered, irrational kind of place.<sup>11</sup> The "nonsolution" of the story is also complicated by the primary detective in "Fits"—Robert—who proves to be no detective at heart. Bennett and Brown argue that every detective story has

“two time sequences,” past and present and, they argue, “The narrative of the present seems transparent, but the narrative of the past is obscured, fragmented, perhaps invisible. It is supplied neither by the narrator [n]or a character but must be constructed, first in the mind of the detective and ultimately in the mind of the reader” (187). They go on to say that the narrative of the past is the one that “causes the mystery” and “disrupts the present” (187), whereas “The narrative of the present shows how that disruption [is] being dealt wit[h]—by recovering or reconstructing the past” (187). However, in “Fits,” although Robert initially begins to reconstruct the past, he ultimately realizes that he really has no desire to reconstruct it fully, and he believes that there is “One discrepancy, one detail—one lie—that would never have anything to do with him” (176). Although he eventually brings himself to the point where he can return home, there is little indication that he will resolve the “errors of avoidance” (174) that have plagued all of his relationships.

So the question remains: if we are left with so much uncertainty, why do we, as readers, enjoy “Fits” so much? What is it about horror and unsolved mysteries that delights us? Pinedo says that horror enables us to confront our worst fears in a safe way: “Horror is an exercise in recreational terror, a simulation of danger not unlike a roller coaster ride . . . . Throughout, the element of control, the conviction that there is nothing to be afraid of turns stress / arousal . . . into a pleasurable sensation. Fear and pleasure comingle” (39). Besides enabling us to confront our fears, Pinedo says that “horror exposes the terror *implicit* in everyday life: the pain of loss, the enigma of death, the unpredictability of events, the inadequacy of intentions” (39). In reading “Fits,” then, we might not be able to purge our fear completely, but fiction allows us a contained form in which to face temporarily our discomfort and then repress it once more. We enter Munro’s house of horrors with the expectation that we can leave its recreational terror behind at any time. However, if Munro is correct in saying that we are altered by every house of fiction that we enter, perhaps we leave “Fits” with a foreboding sense of the real terror and the “periodic fits” that may await us outside.

#### NOTES

I would like to thank Tracy Ware and Sean Burgess for their meticulous proofreading, insightful suggestions, and support, and Jeremy Lalonde for his generosity in sharing sources on Munro and detective fiction.

- 1 In his analysis of Munro’s early fiction, Robert Thacker, for example, astutely argues that her retrospective style is “the catalytic factor in Munro’s substantial art” (37). Citing an oft-quoted passage from her story, “Material,” he goes on to say that “Munro’s narrative

dialectics . . . , by balancing one point of view against another, allow her to create her own 'clear jelly,' which presents a comprehensive understanding to her readers" (58). Clear jelly is not exactly clear, however; jelly is a distorting kind of filter through which to view the world. Coral Ann Howells demonstrates her understanding of this distortion when she employs Munro's comparison between fiction and houses in order to demonstrate how the shifting spaces and shifting perspectives in Munro's fiction operate to create an "art of indeterminacy" in which "her narratives evade any single meaning but allow room for the interplay of shifting multiple meanings and of multiple human interests" (85-86)

- 2 As Zlosnik and Horner argue, humour in the gothic genre is actually the result of the "juxtaposition of incongruous textual effects" (3).
- 3 Becker calls Munro's technique one of "radical domestication," which leads to "excessive realism." In explaining the effect of this excessive realism, Becker refers to Magdalene Redekop's argument that Munro's domestication is so radical that it becomes unhomely, or *unheimlich* (Becker 104).
- 4 In Charles Hanly's Freudian reading of "Fits," sexual violence does not seem extraordinary for Peg or Clayton because it is linked to primal scene phantasies that we have all experienced as children. Although I find his article compelling in its understanding of the link between sexual violence and childhood repression, and in his analysis of Robert's denial, I think that Hanly overestimates the extent to which we can psychoanalyze Peg precisely because he projects certainty into the central gap of the story. Hanly asserts that we can view Peg's account of her discovery of the Weebles' corpses as a demonstration of her denial, but since we can never know what Peg actually saw, it is impossible to determine whether or not she is in a state of denial. On this point, Hanly neglects the fact that the story is told through Robert's focalization and that it is Robert who asserts that Peg has lied about what she saw. (169)
- 5 James Carscallen argues that Munro's wordplay evokes the doubling of the Weebles' and the Kuipers' relationships:

[W]e have to see that the two facing houses of the story are the same house, the two facing marriages the same marriage; and when Peg's son says that an earthquake is just a 'periodic fit' (126) . . . we have to see what is implied in Munro's typical play on the word 'fit.' . . . A 'periodic fit,' after all, is at once a disruption and a regular part of a cycle. ( 230)

- 6 The cinematic effect of this story is another reason that focalization is an effective term to use in this context because, as Bal notes, the term focalization is a technical term that derives from photography and film (102).
- 7 Indeed, even the third person narrator is uncertain about some of the details. For example, in describing Peg's son, the narrator says, "Kevin was taller already than Clayton or Peg, *perhaps* taller than Robert" [my emphasis] (460).
- 8 Tani does not posit a rupture between modern and postmodern detective fiction. Despite its emphasis on rationality, Tani says that even in Poe's fiction there remain seeds of doubt: "The restoration of order and rationality is never complete in Poe's fiction—or in his life, for that matter—because each term inevitably evokes its opposite" (7).
- 9 I found myself in the role of thwarted reader-detective-psychoanalyst when, while comparing the two versions of "Fits," I noticed that in the *Grand Street* version, Peg's "usual lunch" is described as "a crusty roll with ham and cheese" (47) and the stain of blood on her coat is described as "a long ugly smear" (47) whereas in the *Progress of Love* version,

the sandwich is “a roll with ham and cheese” and the blood on Peg’s coat is “a long crusty smear” (159). After trying to read Freudian or even metonymic significance into the editorial change, I came up with no further insight than that Munro made an aesthetic decision to use “crusty” to describe the blood instead of the ham-roll.

- 10 It is important to make a distinction between Pinedo’s use of the word terrorism and our post 9/11 understanding of and sensitivity to the term. Pinedo herself distinguishes between *terror* and *recreational terror*. She says that her understanding of the function of recreational terror is akin to Freud’s understanding of the function of dreams (39). Containment is the key to both dreamwork and recreational terror, because, Pinedo argues, “Much as the horror film is an exercise in terror, it is also an exercise in mastery, in which controlled loss substitutes for loss of control” (41). I would say that for Pinedo, terrorism is akin to feeling *terrorized*; in other words, terrorism is a profound, unsettling and uncontrollable feeling of fear that is distinct from the controlled feeling of fear that *recreational terror* creates.
- 11 Strangely enough, Munro does not believe in leaving it to the reader, as Bennett and Brown demonstrate by quoting Val Ross’ article about her interview with Munro:

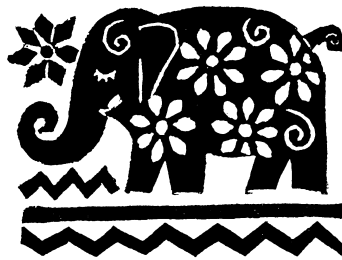
Writing in the *Globe and Mail* about the ‘unsolved murder’ in “Open Secrets,” Val Ross commented: ‘It is only unresolved to the community,’ and adds that Munro has told [her]: ‘I meant to indicate that Theo is probably the murderer.’ Ross adds—surprisingly some may feel—that Munro ‘takes a dim view of the postmodern tendency to drop responsibility for the story in readers’ laps.’ [She] quotes Munro again: “‘I think it is incumbent on the author to know who did it. If an author doesn’t know, the story is just trickery.’” (198)

Bennett and Brown go on to argue, “Such a story makes [us] want to return once more to “Fits,” to look again for clues [we’ve] missed. But then [we] notice that she only says the author needs to know the answer—and not that she needs to reveal it to the reader” (198).

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## What I will not remember

from the cylinder of my days  
is tossing earlier drafts of some poems  
into the blue recycling bag on Thurs. night  
wondering what will flip before me  
at breath's precipice, and where  
the unwanted poems will go,  
imagining some desperate soul picking  
through garbage bags, finding  
and ingesting them, amused, enchanted  
or disappointed they are not beer cans.

I will not remember the day  
I rifled through my daughter's desk  
owning the problem of her homework,  
or the stir fry at the college cafeteria  
with too much peanut-satay sauce  
that set me choking over conversation  
about a colleague in palliative care.

I will not remember the sun bathing my face  
the day I lay stretched on the floral comforter,  
snuggling back in for more sleep,  
prickly light in my spine,  
thinking myself lucky to be alive,  
my family in the next room.

I will enter the trivial, forgotten moments,  
wondering how poetry reconstructs memory  
and walks with it, oriflamme,  
through time's great gaps.



# Don't Hanker to Be No Prophet:

## Guy Vanderhaeghe and the Bible

**A**lthough not a conventionally religious writer, Guy Vanderhaeghe in his fiction has often contemplated faith, a feature of his work that has gone relatively unremarked.<sup>1</sup> On first consideration, Vanderhaeghe would appear to have little patience for religion. David Arnason's assessment in 1986 remains in accord with the general position two decades later: the award-winning 1982 story collection *Man Descending*, wrote Arnason in *Essays on Saskatchewan Writing*, is "sophisticated, intelligent, and wryly comic," with a "bleak" informing vision (125). Dennis Cooley, writing more recently in the *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada*, emphasizes the "brutal," "treacherous," and "grotesque" elements of Vanderhaeghe's work (1161). Vanderhaeghe himself said to Alan Twigg in 1984 that "what's most innate in my nature is a kind of measured scepticism" (273). More and more frequently, he is discussed as a historical novelist (such are the references to him in the *Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature*), especially since his last two novels, *The Englishman's Boy* (1996) and *The Last Crossing* (2002) are deeply and provocatively involved with the representation of western Canadian history. The presenter of an Honorary Degree to Vanderhaeghe at the University of Saskatchewan in 1997 was particularly insistent on the accuracy of his work: "What he writes, in fact, is history, our history" ("90th Anniversary Convocation").

There is little in the admiring reviews of Vanderhaeghe over the years, or in the small number of critical analyses about him, to alter this impression of an essentially agnostic spirit. Yet he declared the Bible foremost in his list of intellectual influences in a 1984 interview with Morris Wolfe, and after

Wolfe said, "You yourself, I take it, are an agnostic," Vanderhaeghe replied, "I call myself a Christian. Other Christians, however, may not agree with me. But I think I am a Christian of some kind—maybe an eccentric and anarchic one" (28). It is not impossible, of course, to be a believer and simultaneously to take a dim view of human life: one thinks of Dostoyevsky (who provides, however, fewer laughs than Vanderhaeghe). Vanderhaeghe has proven to be a difficult writer to summarize in part because he has several different manners, primarily his early comic prairie realism and, later, what has been considered by Martin Kuester and (with reservations) Herb Wyile to be "historiographic metafiction." In relation to other prairie writers, he neither exemplifies the madcap postmodernism of Robert Kroetsch and David Carpenter, nor the demotic realism of Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross, although he has affinities with all of these.

To add religion to the mix may seem to complicate unnecessarily an already fragile understanding of Vanderhaeghe. It is not easy to identify him by using classic theories of the intersection of religion and literature. He is not overly interested in what Northrop Frye calls our society's "mythological conditioning" (xviii) in Biblical stories. Frank Kermode's description of modern fiction as suffused with crisis, aligned with an Apocalypse "immanent rather than imminent" (30), is an apt description of the world of *The Englishman's Boy*. But for the most part Vanderhaeghe is less driven by cultural anxieties or mythological reconsiderations than individual inquiry. He is grappling with the subject of sorrow, and is driven to adopt a Biblical vocabulary of lament for that personal and ruminative quest.

Vanderhaeghe encounters religion in a variety of ways: references in the short stories are often caustic, while *The Englishman's Boy* and *The Last Crossing* abound with ironic and violently parodic uses of Biblical ideas. Yet the contradictions and hypocrisies within the Judeo-Christian tradition are told not from the viewpoint of dissent—or at least not total dissent—but instead are presented by someone considering and reconsidering his engagement with, even responsibility for, the current state of faith. Two early and obvious indications of engagement with Christianity are the stories "Lazarus" and "No Man Could Bind Him," re-tellings of Gospel accounts of Christ's miracles. Found in the neglected collection of stories *The Trouble with Heroes* (a 1983 book that is probably Vanderhaeghe's first collection, although it was released later than *Man Descending*), these two stories appear to discredit Christian faith, displaying believers as objects of ridicule, abandoned by their Saviour after the miracles are over. Both Lazarus and the miraculously

healed demoniac in the story of the Gadarene swine are presented as wandering, uncomprehending and alone, through a pointless-ever-after life (in the case of Lazarus, apparently an interminable living death). However, these stories are less discouraging than they seem, and I will return to them in greater detail.

Some of his better-known stories also comment on religious inquiry and uncertainty. A common characteristic of a Vanderhaeghe protagonist is a feeling of intense conflict between the capacity for reason and faith. He is a great proposer of questions; it is noteworthy how often his stories end with question marks. One of his key areas of questioning is: Have human beings lost their ability for real faith? And what is the cost if we have? In "Things as They Are?"—a crucial story for understanding Vanderhaeghe's view of realism—the main character's brandy-saturated inclination toward realism, or indeed cynicism, is shaken by an encounter with religious faith. He has a terrible vision in a church; he feels driven to account for an acquaintance's rather grotesque but grim determination to offer himself to God through the monastic life. In "Drummer," Billy Simpson's physical admiration for the devout Nancy Williams leads him to attend Faith Baptist Church merely to look at her and raise his standing with her strict family. Eventually Billy becomes fascinated by Nancy's joyous faith, shining in her face "all hot and happy-looking, exactly like it did when we were dancing together." Vanderhaeghe finishes with one of his challenging questions: "What's she dancing to? Who's the drummer?" (112).

Other Vanderhaeghe short stories that touch on religion are less ambiguous in their intention. "How the Story Ends" plainly emphasizes a child's horror at the sadism implicit in the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac. "It's stupid! It's stupid! You're stupid!" is Little Paul's reaction to Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son (72). His great-uncle, Tollefson, tries to explain to the child the Bible's lesson of obedience, but Little Paul is uncomprehending. When Tollefson explains that pigs on their farm must be slaughtered because God wants it, Little Paul reveals the depth of his confusion. "Is he hungry? Please, is that how the story ends?" (78). Not only does Little Paul conflate the potential butchering of Isaac and the farm's pigs, he sees God as a voracious consumer who might even eat Little Paul. The child has unsuccessfully tried to pray to God about his fears: "I talk and talk but he doesn't answer me what you got planned for me" (78). "Man on Horseback" offers another discouraging, although less hysterical, reading of religion. "In Christian art the horse is held to represent courage and generosity," reads

the final paragraph. "In the catacombs it was, with the fish and the cross, a common symbol. No one is absolutely certain what its meaning was, although it is assumed it represents the swift, fleeting, and transitory character of life" (51). Here the metaphysical aspect of existence is ignored in favour of the finite and mortal.

*The Englishman's Boy* continues the negative depiction of Christianity, or rather the use of Christian elements is largely parodic. Vanderhaeghe unequivocally presents the posse of twelve, aggressors in the Cypress Hills Massacre, as an appalling inversion of the New Testament twelve. Religious utterance in the mouths of the posse members is almost entirely blasphemous. The leader, Hardwick, delights in the idea of killing Indians: " 'Happy is the man doing the Lord's work,' he said" (46). At first they are thirteen, "and thirteen being the number around the table at the Last Supper, there could be no worse luck," reports the narrator (52). When the wretched farmboy Hank is abandoned by the expedition, the thirteen become twelve, but instead of Hank being a Christ-figure, the sacrifice is of an unsympathetic idiot.

Hank's blind white horse similarly resonates with scriptural significance and then confounds it. Although the Englishman's boy, later identified as Shorty McAdoo, says to Hank, " 'That is one sorry-ass horse and you are one sorry-ass son of a bitch' " (76), the horse is insistently described in Revelation language as "the white horse" and occasionally as "the pale horse." The pale horse in Revelation 6 carries Death, and the rider on the white horse in that chapter has been variously interpreted, but can be associated with the Antichrist (Krodel 173-75, Ford 104-106). The white horse in Revelation 19, however, is definitely associated with the Messiah. Vanderhaeghe uses these contending symbols of good and evil interchangeably, although Hank's horse's blindness adds weight to the pathetic or ominous side of the equation.

In the nineteenth-century level of the novel, only the Englishman's boy and his ally Ed Grace stand outside the irreverence of this crew of perverse disciples. Earlier, Hank had invoked the example of the Good Samaritan and the Englishman's boy temporarily saved his life by goading Hank's old white horse mercilessly, to keep Hank from being abandoned in the wilderness. Vanderhaeghe's language here is overtly Biblical:

But the Englishman's boy did not leave off. He pursued horse and man across the wastes like a banishing Bible angel harrying the exile with fiery sword and implacable visage, a strange white-faced angel scrunched in a big derby hat and flapping coat, blade glittering in his upraised hand. (76)

This description combines tones of earnestness and irony; the Englishman's boy is linked with both the angelic and demonic riders in Revelation, both categories being associated with swords. However, the Englishman's boy explicitly rejects a heroic or virtuous identity. He is uneasy with the apocalyptic atmosphere surrounding the posse:

Out there in the belly of the night, the old blind white horse and whatever sat on its back were stirring, the shadows parting and closing convulsively in the effort to give birth to this presence, to push this dead-white and terrifying thing, inch by inch, into his mind.

This ain't no vision, he told himself, jerking his eyes up at the stars. Get yonder, second sight. Shake loose of me. I don't hanker to be no Jew prophet. Hear me? (125)

A more unambiguously heroic role is assigned to Ed Grace, one of the Canadian members of the posse and the only white to die in the massacre. Nicknamed Eagle, Ed Grace dies saving the unworthy posse. Although one is tempted to see his name in an overtly symbolic light, Grace was an actual historical character (Sharp 64). Grace's death is not the only potential religious martyrdom, as the Assiniboine warriors slaughtered by Hardwick's band and the Assiniboine girl raped and burned in the aftermath of the massacre are similarly presented as emblematic victims. The girl's innocence in particular is unconditional and striking.

In the novel's twentieth-century layer, the insane Hollywood director Damon Ira Chance signifies several different Judas and Jesus identifications. Chance claims explicitly that his hired researcher, Harry Vincent, must play a necessary Judas figure. This insistence assigns a Christ role, implicitly, to Shorty McAdoo, whose life story they have been appropriating and exploiting (297). But Chance himself becomes a satirical Christ in his own death scene. Shot by McAdoo's friend Wylie, Chance bleeds to death in the arms of Harry, a man who despises him. The scene is a *Pietà* mockery, complete with a canvas awning that "rips, shreds in the wind with a wrenching, desolate sound" in imitation of the veil of the temple, rent at the moment of Christ's death. Vincent watches as Chance dies, and the final words of the episode tell us that Chance's blood "spills down my arm, marking me" (323). Chance views himself as a martyr to art, but the reader knows that he is a racist, paranoid madman, even an antichrist figure.

Commentary on religion in *The Englishman's Boy* is difficult because Vanderhaeghe's symbolism is not only ironic but overabundant, with possible identifications doubled or redoubled. The several suggested symbolic

Christs can be seen to cancel each other out, and Chance's antichrist dominates. Judas figures are easier to identify; there are few heroes in Vanderhaeghe's fiction, and plenty of traitors and cowards. The one spiritual area that Vanderhaeghe leaves untroubled by irony in *The Englishman's Boy* is Native religion. The first and last chapters of the book feature the Assiniboine character Fine Man, whose reverence for his band's holy man, Strong Bull, is manifestly sincere. This reverence dominates the final pages of the book: it is significant that Fine Man is proudly leading a blue horse to his people, in answer to the swirling and self-defeating qualities of the pale and white horses of Christian scriptures.

The world of this novel is brutal, the peace and compassion of the Christian message at a far remove, yet Vanderhaeghe is unwilling to let go of the Judeo-Christian story. The key implication of his use of religion in *The Englishman's Boy* is that the apocalyptic and violent sections of the Bible furnish a forceful language to expose the hidden barbarisms in Canadian history. Yet the passion that Vanderhaeghe invests in his flurry of religious allusions provides the sense that his irony here is more mournful than sardonic. Vanderhaeghe can imbue the prairie landscape with fearful Biblical resonance. The scene in chapter 3 where men on the deck of a stern-wheeler massacre a herd of buffalo trapped in the Missouri River is intensely infernal, as is the torching of Farwell's trading post at the climax of *The Englishman's Boy*. Timothy Findley's dust-jacket endorsement described Shorty McAdoo's story as a "journey into hell and back." This is less a metaphorical hell than a hell transplanted with startling accuracy into home territory.

Religion is even more to the forefront of *The Last Crossing*. A quixotic religious quest provides the motivating impetus for yet another frontier expedition, this one led by Charles and Addington Gaunt as they search for their missing brother, Simon. Simon has travelled from England to North America in the 1870s because he is obsessed with the Church of the Christian Israel, led by the Reverend Obadiah Witherspoon. They hold to a doctrine that "the Red Indians are descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel" (213). Witherspoon's mission, which may be regarded politely as misguided or more starkly as imperialist, is given as Vanderhaeghe's most obvious condemnation of religion in the novel, but there are others. The courageous Lucy Stoveall is bent on avenging the murder of her sister Madge because "I can't leave it to God. I don't see God hereabouts. There's only Lucy Stoveall" (233). The Doxology is used as an "English death chant" by a Cree/Scots halfbreed as he kills enemy Blackfoot (335). Especially ghastly is the

last line of the chapter where the villainous Addington Gaunt is killed in a bear hunt. Addington is the least Christ-like person in the book, but the narrator's final word on his death is "It is finished" (312). Most of these Biblical reverberations are in the same acerbic vein as the religious references in *The Englishman's Boy*, but an additional element in *The Last Crossing* makes its ultimate portrayal of the Judeo-Christian tradition less derisive.

This is the character of Custis Straw. The characters in *The Englishman's Boy* and *The Last Crossing* are aligned among three groups. In *The Englishman's Boy* these are the villains (Chance, Hardwick), the honest but weak protagonists (Vincent, McAdoo), and the courageous but anti-social wanderers (Grace). In *The Last Crossing*, Addington Gaunt is in the first category; Charles Gaunt in the second; Jerry Potts, the third. Custis Straw in *The Last Crossing* is unusual in that he moves out of the second category to become a new, larger kind of personality, and one of the major reasons, in my opinion, that *The Last Crossing* is a more satisfying novel than *The Englishman's Boy*. Custis has elements of the fool, and is capable of bravery when necessary, but most intriguingly, he ruminates constantly on religious issues. From Custis' shrewd point of view we see Madge's funeral, led by the inane Methodist preacher Mr. Clumb: "After he waded through the hymn, Clumb began to hop about, nimble as a flea, taking a bite from Holy Scripture wherever he landed" (69). Custis is not a non-believer, however. He ponders the lessons to be learned from "the Old Adam" (323) and, in a long passage, from the story of Moses (341). His meditations on the Bible combine scepticism and genuine agreement. He is a dogged reader of the Bible, attempting to bring both his mind and heart to bear on what he reads:

"The first time I read the Bible cover to cover, I was in an army hospital in Washington," I said. "I had a mind to make myself believe every single word was true. The second time I read it to satisfy myself it was all a lie. Now I read it to weigh both sides, and find some truth." (260)

*The Last Crossing* finally accepts that Englishman Simon Gaunt is indeed a holy fool of some sort. He is tracked to a Crow tribe who have given him the status of a shaman. Simon declares himself dead to English ways and commits himself in love to a spiritual leader of the Crow, the woman Talks Different. As in *The Englishman's Boy*, Native spiritual beliefs are treated without irony.<sup>2</sup> Again, faith and derision mix in Vanderhaeghe's portrayal of religion, but *The Last Crossing* is more open to faith. Religion is central to the plot, and the style is less insistently parodic and ambiguous. Custis Straw's scriptural motto—"Now I read it to weigh both sides, and find some

truth”—suggests a creed that both Custis and his author have reflected on at some length, and find some satisfaction in. And the spiritual integrity of the lost brother, Simon Gaunt, a character with a “calm, quiet” (351) authority, is unprecedented in Vanderhaeghe’s fiction. Yet Simon has had to move outside Christianity to find this peace.

**W**ill a return to Vanderhaeghe’s 1983 stories that focus unreservedly on the Christian story, “Lazarus and “No Man Could Bind Him,” resolve any of the uncertainties in his presentation of religion? “Lazarus” is the less complicated of the two stories. Vanderhaeghe, in a straightforward narrative with no anachronistic comments or postmodern techniques, somberly imagines the dilemma of Lazarus, still alive decades after being raised from the dead. His sisters, Mary and Martha, are dead. The Messiah is gone, and Lazarus is waiting to act as witness when he comes again. But, like the Cumaean Sybil and Tithonus in Greek myth, Lazarus has been granted eternal life without youth, and his existence is a misery. In the village of Bethany he is a forgotten man. There are rumours that he came back from the dead, “although that is scarcely credible” says a fellow villager (49). They consider him mad, when they consider him at all.

Life goes on as before, both bad and good. Bethany is “disorder, a jumble of houses, a tangle of streets.” In the landscape are no birds; “an occasional cypress scars the bright horizon.” Vanderhaeghe writes: “But here there is also life, and the streets are ripe with the bitter odours of domesticity” (43). The descriptive terms—“disorder,” “tangle,” “bitter,” “scar”—are bleak, and one of the key impressions left by the story is of dust and heat, as in Martin Scorsese’s film of *The Last Temptation of Christ*. But into the midst of Lazarus’ dusty agony comes a marriage caravan, and the story continually juxtaposes the vitality and colour of a marriage feast with Lazarus’ cruel living death.

Lazarus in the gospel of John is beloved by Jesus; the famous verse “Jesus wept” (John 11:35) refers to Christ’s grief when he hears of his friend’s death. But not much more about Lazarus’ character is available in the original story, except for some brief remarks that the chief priests are plotting not only to kill Jesus, but also Lazarus, whose living presence is such a threat to their authority (John 12: 9-11). Lazarus has exercised a fascination over writers both ancient and modern, with many of them wondering just what it is that Lazarus knows about death. In Robert Browning’s “Karshish,” for example, Lazarus comes across as a good but foolish man, with nothing momentous to say about his encounter with divinity. Karshish, an Arab physician, does



experience, however, a feeling of awe in contemplation of Lazarus. In "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," T. S. Eliot provides one of the most famous modern references to Lazarus. Prufrock believes that even if he were Lazarus, come to tell the secrets of the tomb, his society would not care to hear and would respond with: "That is not what I meant at all. / That is not it, at all." Leslie M. Thompson in his 1978 survey of the Lazarus motif finds that in their handling of the story modern writers generally "stress the themes of despair, futility, isolation, alienation, cynicism, and fear of catastrophic destruction" (329).

Vanderhaeghe is situated somewhere between Browning's generally positive reading of the tale and the more widespread modern insistence on Lazarus' anguish. And although Vanderhaeghe's fiction is often very funny, he does not use the Lazarus story for humour, as does James Joyce, for example, in *Ulysses*: "Come forth, Lazarus! And he came fifth and lost the job" (107). In Vanderhaeghe's extrapolation of the Gospel story, Lazarus is a scholar, and the only pleasures that remain to him in his isolation are his studies. Villagers speculate that "too many letters, too many words, addled his brain" (49). A large part of the story is taken up with Lazarus' internal debate about the reason for his immortality. He believes he is tempted by a demon who needles him with many unanswerable questions. Why has he been chosen for eternal life? Because the Messiah will need a witness when he comes? But isn't it presumptuous to think that the Messiah needs anything? Is he being tested to see if, in his suffering, he will turn against God? What if all of humanity is doomed because he, Lazarus, fails as a witness? Vanderhaeghe is primarily interested in the conflict raging between the character's faith and his ability to reason. Both elements are central to his personality. Yet Lazarus cannot reconcile them.

The initial impression given by this effective and moving little story is sadness and futility. Although Vanderhaeghe does not state this fact, the meaning of the name "Lazarus" is "God is my help," underscoring the irony of Lazarus' suffering. The story's penultimate paragraph reads: "Tomorrow of course, he will be tired, hungry, and sore. He will plead for strength to play the demon's role and doubt if he can endure." The keynotes sounded are doubt, pain, exhaustion. Altering that pessimism, however, is the story's final line: "But now in this night, he is sure it is not a bad thing to be still, to be silent, and to wait" (50).

"Not a bad thing." This resolution is far from joyful, but it is not without hope. It is useful to place "Lazarus" next to "No Man Could Bind Him," a

longer story that considers the man possessed by a legion of devils in Mark 5 and Luke 8, because the tiny, ambivalent convictions of “Lazarus” are somehow bolstered by the equally tiny, ambivalent convictions of the other. Joint exegesis of this sort may seem odd, but Vanderhaeghe often writes paired stories—there are two Billy Simpson stories, two about Ed the exuberant loser, and two about Charlie, the boy in “The Watcher.” While “Lazarus and “No Man Could Bind Him” are not paired in precisely the same way, their Gospel origins and thematic concerns are closely related.

In “No Man Could Bind Him” reason and faith again conflict, and this time the tension is more extensively considered. Here reason is associated with Greek culture, while faith is a Jewish attribute. Both cultures come in for their share of ridicule. Reason is admirable and seductive, but it belongs to the Greek rulers and they are too removed, too cerebral. Jewish faith looks more humane yet is revealed to be comparatively stupid, lonely, perhaps pointless. (Interestingly Vanderhaeghe has no interest in the Romans and leaves them out of this equation altogether.) The passion that Vanderhaeghe, born in Esterhazy, Saskatchewan, invests in the account of this classical conflict is perplexing, unless one recognizes that these historical tales are told not only for their own sake (and they are), but also to cast light on present matters—just as *The Englishman’s Boy* and *The Last Crossing* intend to provoke debate both about frontier history and about attitudes toward Americans and aboriginals in the present day. His characters are tragically thwarted, in the past and present. Vanderhaeghe presents faith as necessary for the poor and the lost—the central cast of his fiction, in fact—but he wonders if the present world is too inhospitable a place for ancient religious beliefs to flourish. The religious instinct in his Biblical stories is bodily, natural, warm (although also foolish). The protagonists are too “Greek”—too cerebral, too cynical, too much like twentieth- and twenty-first-century people. They distance themselves from the comfort that faith might offer.

The notion that propels “No Man Could Bind Him” is to delineate not only the troubling aftermath of Christ’s miracle healing of the man possessed by demons who lived among the tombs in Gadara, but also to create a back story for him. What exists in the Gospels of Mark and Luke is already intriguing. (An account in Matthew 8, which Vanderhaeghe ignores, features two demoniacs.) Asked his name by Jesus in both accounts, the possessed man answers similarly in each: “My name is Legion; for we are many.” He begged him earnestly not to send them out of the country” (Mark 5:9-10

NRSV; see also Luke 8:30-31). In a few lines, we find out more about this individual sufferer than is usual in the New Testament. The demoniac has superhuman strength, and both worships Jesus immediately and demands that Jesus not torment him. Once Jesus expels the demons and has them enter thousands of pigs, which throw themselves into the sea, the dispossessed man attaches himself in gratitude to Jesus, begging to stay with him. The healed, sane man inspires even more fear than the insane one formerly did; the people also fear Jesus after this miracle and ask him to depart. The Gospel story demonstrates that the sane individual and the insane multitude of demons co-exist, in full and conscious struggle (the demoniac both roars at Jesus and worships him; *he* begged Jesus not to send *them*). A contemporary understanding of the miracle, perhaps one underpinned by Jungian ideas, would see Jesus not so much expelling evil as creating unity for the man. After all this, however, Jesus does not give him shelter from the world's miseries but sends him out to attest to God's mercy.

Guy Vanderhaeghe picks up, once again, on the discord within the individual. In "No Man Could Bind Him" he decides that the possessed man was as a child a "barbarous" Jewish outcast adopted by a Greek family in Decapolis (21) and given the incongruous name of Stephen ("crown" or "garland"). The pull between his Jewish birth and his Greek upbringing creates too much tension for him, and he becomes mad. Once healed by Jesus, Stephen dutifully stands at the city gates, telling of his release. But Vanderhaeghe then moves on past the death of Stephen, telling this whole story through the viewpoint of Stephen's adoptive Greek brother, actually the more important character in the story. The narrator tries to trace an understanding of Stephen's encounter with Jesus, believed to be a commonplace magician. The story begins and ends with the Greek foster brother hauling Stephen's rotting corpse back to Gadara, to honour his last request. The positive aspects of this act of brotherly loyalty are countered by grotesque or downbeat descriptions; the second sentence, for instance, provides a vivid illustration of a sailor, "the surly Galilean with the nasty nest of boils on his neck" (19).

The multiple personalities of the possessed man are given a sociological and political basis in Vanderhaeghe's story: Stephen is not so much mad or mentally ill (a common modern interpretation of New Testament possession) as caught between cultures. For Stephen, the Greeks "need no Messiah to drive out the oppressor" (29) because they constitute a ruling class. Greek erudition is a mistake: "Greeks put too many things in books and then

consider matters settled by arranging the alphabet," he says. But Stephen's Jewish roots, on the other hand, merely provide him with guilt: "[W]ithout the government of God the stars would fall down. I knew I was a bad Jew because I did not keep the Law. But I knew there was Law" (30). Even the Greek foster brother feels the tension between Greek and Jewish, between reason and emotion: "A man like myself, a man who lives in the light of reason, knows that sometimes sanity is a course we choose and lucidity an acquired taste that runs counter to our nature. I wanted to see this man who had surrendered to impulse" (24). Although the narrator lives his life "with studious care and a just regard for sensibility" (27), he is not happy, and he is fascinated by Stephen and his master, "the magician Jesus of Nazareth" (35). He notes that "in the presence of great holiness or madness man recognizes his limitations" (25).

At the story's conclusion, as in "Lazarus," one runs up against unbelief, heat and filth, a landscape without mercy: "The sweat burned my eyes as I blinked at the blank blue sky. Some bird of prey spun high above me, turning lazily on rising currents of air." The final sentence is one of Vanderhaeghe's trademark questions: "What would my brother have felt if it had been given him to know that master and disciple were destined to take their leave of the world together—at Passover?" (35) Also as in "Lazarus," Christian confidence appears to be undermined: the sky is blank, nature is represented by a predator, the Jewish magician who preached eternal life has just died. Yet once again Vanderhaeghe in the last paragraphs scatters a few scraps of hope. Looking at the bird of prey, the Greek narrator relates that "from where I stood I could not detect the wind's rush through his pinions, nor fathom the force that suspended him above the grip of the earth. Nevertheless the invisible bore him up" (35). Combined with the surprising fact of the narrator's loyalty to his "barbarous" foster brother, this invisible force acts as a leavening agent within the story's pessimism, holding out the possibility of illumination. The Greek does not grasp the significance of Jesus, but the deliverance of Stephen from madness is told sincerely. Vanderhaeghe sketches a gritty agnostic reality peopled by characters whose alienation and corruption are repeatedly underscored. Yet they long for the warmth of a faith that Vanderhaeghe will not label illusory.

**E**arlier in his career, Guy Vanderhaeghe published two poems on Biblical themes. "The Doctrine of Water," in the Winter 1981-1982 *Dalhousie Review*, focuses on John the Baptist. *Queen's Quarterly* in Autumn

1981 published "There is No Accounting for Taste," Vanderhaeghe's version of the Old Testament story of Jacob. Both poems are skillful, exuding Vanderhaeghe's signature physicality. The Jacob poem is full of palpable rockiness, echoing the notion that Jacob is the sort to pillow his head on a rock. There are "granitic visions of stony-faced cherubim"; sleep is "flinty." The poem is bemused by God's preference for a thief and a fierce wrestler, and a vivid stanza depicts the clash of God and man, full of "anxious pinions crackling" and "contending sinews." Twice the poet repeats the idea found in the title: if Jacob is favoured by God, "there is no accounting for Yahweh's taste."

There is less comedy and more heartache in "The Doctrine of Water." As in the other poem, the intense actuality of a hard world is invoked:

Begotten of age and dryness  
 John grew to be a granular man,  
 A lover of deserts and crackling locust meat;  
 Hard white stars and blue, blue nights;  
 Fever, thorns, potsherds, and prophecy.

This environment is a harsh challenge that John the Baptist rises to, and then some. With maniacal devotion, he shouts out "the doctrine of water" until he can no longer speak. When it is revealed that "cousin Yeshua" is the Messiah and the Baptist is not, John is "full of grief" and weeps "mere prophet's tears."

Each poem insists on the human qualities of these Biblical personalities, rather than the divine. Each provides a wry twist, a wink at sanctimony. But the feeling that the poems evoke, like the stories "Lazarus" and "No Man Could Bind Him," is ultimately one of respectful contention. Vanderhaeghe is engaged with these Christian and Jewish stories not as an unbeliever, but as someone who seeks a fuller understanding of God's purpose. Throughout the overtly Biblical stories and poems, the reader encounters the same fallen and sinful world that Vanderhaeghe's secular fiction presents—a world where goodness is weak and intelligence in short supply (yet both are present), where treachery and cruelty are commonplace. Despite the problems with creation, God still loves it, and the raising of Lazarus, the healing of the Gadarene demoniac, the favouring of Jacob, and the sending of the Baptist's "cousin Yeshua" testify to God's love, however problematic these signs may be. That the miracles are misunderstood, for example by the villagers who are baffled by Lazarus, indicates the vast problems with the human world, not necessarily flaws in the miracles themselves.

But Vanderhaeghe keeps his distance when contemplating God's love of the world, as if asking what God really sees in it. Or rather, while Vanderhaeghe does revel in the vitality of a good joke or in the particularity of a horse's strength (he is a wonderful writer about horses and other animals), he is less than enthusiastic about the world's human inhabitants. However, the more one considers his fiction over the past 20 years, the more it emerges that Guy Vanderhaeghe does care about God. The questions at the end of many of the stories indicate a spiritual hunger, a reluctance to give into the rational self's insistence that faith is foolish. This inclination is complicated by an adamantly unsentimental disposition that shies away from expounding on the mysteries of Christ's love, potentially too maudlin.

Sorrow is another thing. Vanderhaeghe is becoming one of our great delineators of sorrow. In *The Last Crossing*, when Custis Straw is asked "And what in the Good Book have you decided is absolutely and indisputably true?" he answers, "That verse that says 'Jesus wept'" (260). We are returned to the story of Lazarus, and the love of Jesus for his friend. For the most part, Guy Vanderhaeghe finds the world to be an unforgiving place, and he prefers to undermine religious platitudes, exposing the ironies, potential or real, beneath the ancient stories of faith. Yet ultimately the simple reality that "Jesus wept" makes a profound impression on him.

#### NOTES

- 1 Nicholas von Maltzahn is a rare exception; he has noted a strain of "Christian existentialism" in Vanderhaeghe's early work (141).
- 2 Vanderhaeghe's presentation of Native religion is not sustained enough to compare it satisfactorily with his often caustic attitude toward the Judeo-Christian story. But his admiration for the former could be described as surprisingly Romantic.

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## Locating the particle

(Bohr's scissors)

How can we tell who's not looking?  
Someone is counting the spots on film  
when that wave washes over us  
(off course, of course).

From what disconsolate point-of-view  
will we find symmetries (perhaps)  
or disparate descriptions which discount  
each other and exist

at once  
but not both to our looking  
when we do?

Catch us one word, a spatter of fixed dots,,  
its history impossible, unique, and cut  
by our quick looking to one shape  
which

doesn't answer.  
Will it do?

Is any story possible? Spread out your cards.  
At whose blood heat  
do these colliding fractions come to rest?  
All mighty empires hasten to defeat.  
A Sybil freezes history with one sigh.



## Jan Zwicky: Lyric Philosophy Lyric

**T**he publication in 1986 of *Wittgenstein Elegies* coincided with that of several books of poetry taking impetus from Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy, but in contrast to the Language poets Rosemarie Waldrop, Ron Silliman, and Steve McCaffery, Jan Zwicky eschews the formal possibilities inherent in Wittgenstein's critique of language in favour of revisiting genre.<sup>1</sup> Zwicky's is the Wittgenstein not of poststructuralist theory and postmodern aesthetic but a deeply, albeit obliquely, religious ethicist, who deplores the promiscuities of language, and for whom the unsayable is resonance off an occult tympanum. Zwicky invokes voice as the medium of authenticity and meaningful exchange where the Language poets, relying equally on Wittgenstein, dispense with the assumption of a stable, authenticating, and consistent lyric ego prior to language and history.<sup>2</sup>

Zwicky's are elegies not for a deceased paragon but for a misconstrued and thus forsaken legacy. Wittgenstein is more *tzadik* than intellectual, one who, her preface recalls, dedicated his thinking "to the glory of God" (Zwicky 1986, 9).<sup>3</sup> He is for her neither the doyen of Anglo-American analytical philosophy nor the precursor of poststructuralist anti-humanism. She quotes the entire foreword to *Philosophical Remarks*, in which Wittgenstein defines his object as clarity and piety in the service of articulating essence—"an aspect of his work," Zwicky contends, "that I feel has been neglected and a spirit which I feel is missing from much contemporary philosophy—a neglect and an absence which I hope these elegies may go some small way toward remedying" (9). For her that spirit is also missing from contemporary North American poetry.

The *Tractatus* reserves a negative, privileged space for ethics, outside the severely circumscribed zone it grants meaningful philosophical utterance. Wittgenstein delimits the contours of this space with an astringent clarity, then fills the vacuum with apophatic divinity. Zwicky makes of it a habitation of elegy. Affirming Wittgenstein's separation of the spheres of facts and values, and his identification of values with aesthetics, Zwicky finds meaning in the same place as the philosopher, in art; here, in genre. Elegy combines the containment of a venerable literary genre with the liberty of a modern "open" structure. Stanzas and lines of variable length, stresses, and typographical arrangement; a collagist principle of organization; range of lexical tone; an elliptical and condensed syntax and imagery: the elegy admits all these. The centrifugal force of the free verse, however, meets the resistance of a centripetal genre. And Zwicky shows that elegy remains a genre of regenerative constraint, where, as Brian Jones suggests in his forthcoming study of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, we live dying and the dead live.

The elegiac in Zwicky is a clear, empty space, where a concord of voices echo ineffable truths. She yearns for "Absence, / Clear still space where truth might echo" (23). Paradoxes proliferate beneath the "hummed silence" of its stars: meaning is unutterable yet the dead utter meaning; truth is hidden yet simple and self-evident; language is first a labyrinth and next a tool chest (analogies borrowed from the *Philosophical Investigations*); words are actions and absent voices speak.

Of these voices, Rilke's is particularly audible. The poet was the most respected beneficiary of Wittgenstein's lavish one hundred-thousand Kronen donation to "Austrian artists without means" (unbemittelte österreichische Künstler), arranged through Karl Kraus' acolyte Ludwig von Ficker on the eve of World War I.<sup>4</sup> Zwicky, whose criticism and poetry makes numerous admiring references to the poet,<sup>5</sup> strives in the elegiac for what in the *Sonnets to Orpheus* Rilke calls the "dual realm":

Nur wer die Leier schon hob  
auch unter Schatten,  
darf das unendliche Lob  
ahnend erstatten.

Nur wer mit Toten vom Mohn  
aß, von dem ihren,  
wird nicht den leisesten Ton  
wieder verlieren.

[Only who has already raised the lyre / even among shadows / may restore in foreboding / the unending praise. // Only who ate of poppy with the dead / ate of theirs, / will never again lose / even the faintest tone. (Part I, IX, Rilke 1966, 141).\*

Zwicky will restore to praise the squandered legacy of a surreptitiously devout philosophy of apophatic ethical knowledge. She asks: "How ever can we learn / To hear each one distinctly, / Fragile threads in the enormous chorus?" (62) By eating with each the poppy of remembrance. "Only in the dual realm / the voices become/ eternal and mild" (Rilke, 141).<sup>6</sup>

In the first *Duino Elegy*, poetry and consolation emerge from the void the departure of the dead creates. The death of the mythical minstrel Linos stirs from the void a sui generis lament, to which Orpheus replies with the consolation of a threnody. Is that myth in vain, Rilke asks,

daß erst im erschrockenen Raum, dem ein beinah göttlicher Jüngling  
plötzlich für immer eintrat, das Leere in jene  
Schwingung geriet, die uns jetzt hinreißt und tröstet und hilft. (Rilke 1966, 100)  
[that first in the frightened space, in which an almost divine youth  
suddenly for ever entered, the void fell into that  
vibration, which transports us and comforts and helps.]

Wittgenstein operates in Zwicky's *Elegies* much as does Linos in Rilke's, as a force generated in the vacuum of departure. Wittgenstein sets off a vibration in the space his disappearance creates. In the terms of the *Duino Elegies*, that vibration is not lament (*Klage*) but elegy (*Klagelied*), which contains and surpasses lamentation.

Rilke's "vibration"—itself a borrowing from Vassily Kandinsky's early aesthetic—is Zwicky's "echo."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, her account in *Lyric Philosophy* of lyric as "sympathetic resonance" and "echo of the image of integration" is illustrated with quotation from Rilke's poetry. In the anguished love poems of *Where Have We Been*, Zwicky cocks her ear toward the voiceless resonance of mute things, such as the books, table, hand, and "the voices of maples" making a "rare / artless eloquence" in "Things Most Articulate" (Zwicky 1982, 38, 35, 41). Throughout the *Wittgenstein Elegies* she yearns for elegiac resonance, as in the third verse of the book's second section, where antecedentless pronominal fluctuations of person and paraphrastic allusiveness amplify the acoustics of its single, 22-line stanza:

Sometimes he speaks: echoes.  
He speaks echoes. So pure, almost  
Unrecognizable—strain every nerve to catch. (23)

In Zwicky's witty reverberation the inaudible colon disappears and the poet Georg Trakl's echo echoes. The preceding page is a seven-line excerpt from Trakl's "Helian," its celebration of stillness, clarity, and starlight resonating through the *Wittgenstein Elegies*. It strains every nerve to catch such purity, Wittgenstein's as much as Trakl's:

This is what one must wish:  
 No clatter, stripped bare, colours  
 Pure, original; unsayable itself  
 Directly echoed (23)

Within this clamorous matrix of echoes, the poet cannot get the words "clean enough" (23). An anguished puritanism consonant with Wittgenstein's own chastizes awkwardness as "unforgivable" moral failure: "Purity of heart / Eludes me," and with it the possibility of insight. Reverberant "absence . . . chokes, these thick haphazard days" (23).

Collage provides a form, as elegy the tonic chord, for inhabiting this negative space. Collage aids in overcoming the solipsism, insufficiency, and desolation of the poet's language. In collage fresh congruities arise from arresting conjunctions. There is counterpoise, but also collision, cacophony, and agon, as when earlier and later Wittgenstein sententiae are counterpointed. The second section of "The Death of Georg Trakl," for instance, opens with Wittgenstein's renunciation of his colossal inheritance and decision to become a rural teacher. A cento of aphorisms drawn primarily from the *Tractatus* follows, along with reflections on its logic, and then a translation of Trakl's "Schwermut." The section culminates in Trakl's invitation to Wittgenstein, its staccato phrasing a premonition of suicide, realized in a closing *Tractatus* aphorism on death (as though it had issued from Wittgenstein's experience of Trakl's).

Elegiac echo thus organizes the whole poem. Expressed often as "resonance," echo enters equally prominently into Zwicky's philosophical polemics *Lyric Philosophy* and *Wisdom & Metaphor*. These texts assail analytical modes of argument by means of a notational structure indebted to Guy Davenport.<sup>8</sup> The collagist interplay between recto quotation and verso aperçu generates a structure of echo. Both books draw on Stanley Cavell, whose *The Claim of Reason* proposes, in light of the *Philosophical Investigations*, an alternative to analytical philosophy based on principles of voice, finitude, and quotidian experience. "The 'experience' of truth," Zwicky writes in *Wisdom & Metaphor*, "is always the experience of resonance, that is, of the

attunement of various distinct components as a whole" (Zwicky 2003, 37). Lyric is for Zwicky the very membrane on which this attunement sounds. "A lyric image is true," she writes in *Lyric Philosophy*, "because it is resonant" (Zwicky 1992, 426). As a "form of grace" that "occurs in emptiness," lyric is sympathetic response to "the resonant structure of the world" (1992, 312, 128, and 121). While analytic thought and referential doctrines of meaning assume a world of mute "usable objects," rendering the world "voiceless," the "resonant speech" of lyric "opens to presence" (482).

Emptiness, clarity, love, and resonance, those elegiac figures of truth in the *Wittgenstein Elegies*, become in Zwicky's philosophical writings figures for lyric itself. Lyric meanwhile comes to denote not a poetic genre alone but a mode of thinking, indeed an ethical disposition. "The characteristic formal properties of lyric are resonance and integrity," she writes in "Bringham's Presocratics." "Resonance is a form of clarity" (Zwicky 1995, 74). In her earlier book, lyric philosophy is "thought in love with clarity, informed by the intuition of coherence; by a desire to respond to the preciousness of the world" (Zwicky 1992, 192). In support of such a discourse she enlists Wittgenstein. Zwicky argues that, despite its Euclidian mode of argumentation and logical premises, the *Tractatus* transcends the tenets of analytical philosophy in favour of "analysis by lyric" (218). From its title onwards, *Lyric Philosophy* springs from a celebrated entry in Wittgenstein's notebook (published in English as *Culture and Value*): "I think I summed up my attitude to philosophy when I said: philosophy ought really to be written only as a *poetic composition*" (Zwicky 1992, 51; quoting Wittgenstein 1980, 24e).<sup>9</sup> David Schalkwyk argues that literary style enhances the impression of both the particular instance and the ineffable background critical to Wittgenstein's thinking: "Wittgenstein's crucial philosophical task is carried out in the vast network of the literary, in which the situatedness of concepts in human life and the world is registered and imaginatively renewed and tested. In this sense poetry (in the broadest sense of the word) is always written as philosophy, and philosophy (as Wittgenstein understands it) takes on the burdens of poetry. Like Wittgenstein's sketches, poetry shows us both our being at home in language and the strangeness of that home" (Schalkwyk 2004, 71). Zwicky similarly proposes Wittgenstein's axiom means that "philosophy is most likely to achieve what it seeks *when* it acknowledges the possibilities for meaning inherent in lyric uses of language" (176). Her book attempts to identify and to recommend these possibilities.

*Wittgenstein Elegies* describes the obstacles to achieving these inherent meanings. By evoking Trakl's personal tragedy and invoking Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy, Zwicky gives expression to her own exasperation with language and abortive transcendence of its limitations. The penultimate section, "Confessions,"<sup>10</sup> for instance culminates in an enigmatic and unsatisfactory statement of clarity, a collage page beginning with Wittgenstein's repudiated early chimera of "a general form of proposition," juxtaposed with the warning in the *Philosophical Investigations* that our definitions of essences tend only to define our mode of perceiving them. The medley of tags shifts abruptly to the poet's passage into rehabilitating nature:

The silent path. The dappled shore.  
Blue, blue the water.  
Mist above the mountains. Oh  
Can it be borne, a peace this tense  
World swelling like an ache? (55)

Silence, light, echo: pastoral elegy gives back to Zwicky her preferred figures for truth. The ecstatic question recasts the "world" of Wittgenstein's axioms and remembers the "tensed stillness" ("angespannte Stille") of Rilke's "Panther" (Rilke 1966, 29). The question is answered with a self-echoing tetrametre couplet:

Poised as the mist begins to lift.  
Poised as the mist begins to lift. (55)

Zwicky ventures the anaphoric mirror of the most famous tetrametre couplet in English-language poetry, also about taking a silent path. Yet, whereas Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" shows as clearly as Gertrude Stein that there is no such thing as repetition, Zwicky wants a visual and auditory image of the balance her phrase exalts. The epiphany is reassuringly visual and verbal, yet guaranteed neither by image nor testimony but by rhetoric. What is here more "poised" than the lines themselves? The subject is free of obvious antecedent. What "lifts" off are the three iambic feet from the anchoring trochee, culminating in the internal slant rhyme. The image of evaporating mountain vapours seems chosen for its very banality, that it not interfere with the rising cadence of equanimity. And so the poem falls under the spell of language, literally (in this repetition) of its *own* language.

The couplet seems an extreme distillation of the poised dual-periodic movement she admires in the famous closing prohibition of the *Tractatus*:

“Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen” (“of what one cannot speak, one must be silent” [*Tractatus* 7.]). In *Lyric Philosophy*, Zwicky submits the sentence to a bravura metrical analysis to show that “lyric meaning” consists in “speech forswearing speech” (450). Lyric, she states in *Wisdom & Metaphor*, “is, at root, a flight from the condition of language” (2003, unpaginated Foreword). The extreme delicacy of such an operation readily miscarries, and a paradoxical part of the eloquence of the *Wittgenstein Elegies* is its own miscarriages. This is especially so here, where immersion in, rather than injection of, the serum of language occurs. It is the latter Zwicky desires, so as to effect a momentary remedy from what Wittgenstein calls language’s “bewitchment” (*Verhexung*) of our understanding.<sup>11</sup>

The poem—and with it the section—concludes with two single-phrase stanzas, which gloss the forgoing by casting new oracles: “A reach,” she declares, the nominalized verb portentously severed from grammatical referent.<sup>12</sup> “This is the very answer” (55). What is “this”? To what does the relative pronoun relate? To Wittgenstein’s decontextualized “This is how things stand,” quoted at the beginning of the poem? Indeed, to what does her answer reply? To the question whether such peace be borne? The “things” are both incandescently present and impermeable. Yet, as her quotation from the *Philosophical Investigations* seems to reply, we trace finally not the thing but only its frame, that is, our perceptual scheme. These conflicting pronouncements are left in nervous suspension over the rest of the poem, its shoreline imagery and incantatory self-echoing no resolution.

This is how things stand at the beginning of the *Wittgenstein Elegies*’ closing section, “Rosro, County Galway.” Its remoteness (to this day linked only by 80 kilometres of poor roads to Galway) appeals to Zwicky and not its picturesque qualities (during the Great Hunger, North American shipments of corn meal were stored in Wittgenstein’s cottage, and 70 years later the Irish Republican Army held prisoners there). Wittgenstein strewed used tea leaves over the floors of its two peat-heated rooms as sawdust, ate little more than eggs and canned preserves, wrote drafts of Part II of the *Philosophical Investigations*, tamed coastal birds, talked to himself in German, paid visits in Dublin to the psychiatric patients of St. Patrick’s Hospital, and acquired a madman’s reputation that was still fixed, Richard Wall could confirm, a half-century after his sojourn (see Wall 1999, 61-4 and 88-104).<sup>13</sup>

The domestic setting stages a partial reconciliation between ineffable intensities and the objectification of the world that language inevitably involves. Both *Lyric Philosophy* and *Wisdom & Metaphor* extol “domesticity,”

the condition of accepting ourselves as tool-users and its corollary, language-users, and thus of accepting the essential lack of clarity “in human experience attendant on the exercise of our capacity for language” (Zwicky 1992, 524). Domesticity resigns us without bitterness to the lack of verbal access to absolutes, she argues. It acknowledges that the tension between objectification and “the impossible goal of sustained lyric comprehension . . . cannot be resolved” (Zwicky 2003, unpaginated Foreword).

The very fact of a subsequent section implies Zwicky’s dissatisfaction with the pastoral epiphany of the previous one. The tone is deflationary. The philosopher in his cabin, the poet presumably in hers, make a compound figure of vexed ascetic dedication. At Rosro, Wittgenstein is straining to complete the *Philosophical Investigations*, while the poet is straining to make a valid poetic artefact out of her engagement with the philosophy. In vain all the scraping and cutting by which, following Trakl, she had tried to carve out the elegiac space of clear, truth-telling echo: “still not pure enough, no / clarity” (59). Language is intractable. “Words stumble, chitter, clog”—just like these verbs.

The dejected note however conceals an ascending trajectory. In this concluding section comes a climactic restoration of the text’s elegiac figures. Clarity, simplicity, emptiness, and echo: in their belated reintegration, silence again echoes ineffable truth. The elegized dead utter, and the poet records not what they tell but what their telling allows her to show.

One of the dead to utter is Trakl. “Die Schwermut,” first published in Ficker’s Innsbruck journal *Der Brenner* at the time of the poet’s suicide, appears complete (based on Lucia Getsi’s translation, and rendered tepidly as “Sadness”). Zwicky borrows from the war poem its melancholy and several crucial figures, including stars, “stillness” (the *Abendstille* and *stille* monks), a “twilit” landscape (*dämmernder*), speechlessness (the *sprachlos* blood of soldiers), piety (a decaying village’s—although the translation conceals *fromm* beneath “meekly”), and faith amidst devastation (a starlit nun “over the broken bones of men” on the battlefield) (28).

Trakl’s more narrowly biographical role in the *Wittgenstein Elegies* is based on the anguished fervour of his faithless piety (in her elegy on the poet, his friend Else Lasker-Schüler compared Trakl to Martin Luther),<sup>14</sup> and on the pathos of his direct appeal to Wittgenstein. A fifth of Wittgenstein’s anonymous bequest to Austrian artists had been bestowed on Trakl. (Rilke received the equivalent sum; Elsa Lasker-Schüler and Adolph Loos were also among the beneficiaries.) While serving like Wittgenstein in the Hapsburg



army since the outbreak of the war, Trakl learned the identity of his benefactor. After a nervous breakdown and diagnosis of schizophrenia, he wrote a letter of gratitude, imploring Wittgenstein to visit him at the Krakow garrison hospital. That invitation is the poet's core gesture in Zwicky.

Deep gratitude,  
Express myself: please come, please come.  
Oak-panelled trench, please come,  
Stuck fast in mud, next door, now (29)

Upon obtaining leave from his regiment, Wittgenstein hastened to Krakow, but arrived three days after Trakl's death. (The trained pharmacist had taken an overdose of cocaine, but in his correspondence with Ficker, Wittgenstein refrained from calling the death a suicide.)<sup>15</sup> Trakl's appeal was heeded, yet abortive. The poet was waiting for the philosopher (then drafting the *Tractatus*) but his endurance faltered. Perhaps the faith failed him that Wittgenstein, known to him only as a characteristically munificent member of a fabulously wealthy family of arts patrons, could deliver him. So Trakl becomes a tragic avatar. Zwicky too waits for Wittgenstein, waits for the clarity, concentration, and purity to recover that "spirit which I feel is missing from much contemporary philosophy" (9). She awaits, that is, the grace ("Grace is unmoved," an early poem laments [15]) to grasp the unstated ethical import of Wittgenstein's work and life. Sharing with both Wittgenstein and Trakl the conviction that "by any words the truth is unsupportable" (15), can she await him better than had Trakl?

"Rosro" declares that she does, but paradoxically the insight Wittgenstein occasions effaces him. The truth that, following the *Tractatus*, she had assumed to be ineffable, presses into speech. Mind and heart, thought and art, she proposes, might yet unite to compel fragment into whole in an elegiac space. Here alone the inert signifiers mean. "In use they come alive," she notes, yet to this foundational principle of Wittgenstein's later theory of language<sup>16</sup> she adds an ethical rider: "But where there is no courage, / There can be no use, no speaking truth" (60). Zwicky alters Wittgenstein's criterion from utility to veracity. "Use alone shows how a word functions," he states in the *Investigations* (1984, 387 and 398).<sup>17</sup> Meaning is governed by use, and use is historical and contingent; so meaning cannot be directly and permanently verified. It is inseparable from its frame, and the frame is necessarily ungrounded. Certainty in Wittgenstein arises not from positivist criteria of verification but from unacknowledged, profoundly held collective assumptions, primitive to distinctions of truth and falsity.<sup>18</sup>

While renouncing, as had Wittgenstein by 1930 (see e.g. Wittgenstein 2001, 11, 13, and 108), the allure of an immutable formula, Zwicky substitutes, as Wittgenstein emphatically refuses to do, an explicit ethics. Regarding essence in Kantian terms as imperceptible and intimated only by intuition, she enjoins:

The most that we can hope  
Is steadiness of soul    courage  
To render with exactness what is set before us,  
Love what must  
    each time we grasp it  
                                vanish. (61)

The sequence thus returns to and confirms the sacramental yearnings of its opening section: “Truth to make whole presences in every word . . . Love is despite the rock which is the world” (16 and 17). Steadfastness, bravery, precision, and a love that accepts the elusiveness of its transitory objects are Zwicky’s stated ideals in her cabin, even as an explicit ethics were not Wittgenstein’s in his. A providential intervention, “the breath of God” (60), not logic and the philosophy of language, are necessary.

Thus the philosopher is never more absent from the poet than at the apex of their alignment.<sup>19</sup> In terms of the famous *Tractatus* analogy, to which the poem alludes, real perception requires the jettisoning of the very ladder of logical propositions that made the perception accessible: “To see/ Is to be unafraid to cast away the ladder/ We have cherished” (15). What Zwicky ultimately casts away is Wittgenstein himself. Until now the conflict of his diverse utterances impeded as much as occasioned and advanced contemplation. The book’s collagist principle of organization amplified the dissonance. Now she finds in Wittgenstein a place for her own utterance. Collage polyphony yields to lyric epiphany. The section’s five poems make only a single direct reference to his writings, and the import of these verses by no means coincides with his own. She speaks with her own voice from inside his house.

She casts off even the very view, axiomatic in the *Tractatus*, that moral truth may be shown but never stated: “The correct method of philosophy would essentially be this: to say nothing beyond what can be said, that is, the propositions of natural science—thus something having nothing to do with philosophy—and then only when another wishes to say something meta-physical, in order to indicate to him that he has given to certain signs in his propositions no meaning” (*Tractatus* 6.53).<sup>20</sup> “By any words the truth is

unsupportable," Zwicky had stated. Now, in "Rosro," there can indeed be "speaking truth," at least when there is courage.

This claim is not, however, presented as a refutation, nor as deviation, but as an almost mystic consonance with the philosopher. I have said that Wittgenstein is almost absent from the poem's closing section; *elegiacally* absent, I should stress. That is, he appears as an inverse pressure acting upon more tangible agents. Zwicky's elegiac is an empty, clear, silent yet echoing space. The space necessarily defies inscription, the *Tractatus*' zone of embodiment rather than expression.

There are, indeed, things that  
Cannot be put into words. They make  
Themselves manifest. (34)

"There is indeed the inexpressible," Wittgenstein asserts. "It *manifests* itself." Zwicky however omits the amplification: "It is the mystic" (*Tractatus* 6.522).<sup>21</sup> Yet into the mystic the *Wittgenstein Elegies* leads.

"The mystic" comprehends the whole sphere of values. In a November 1919 letter to Ficker, Wittgenstein notoriously insists that the ethical argument of the *Tractatus* is as crucial as it is unstated: "I should like to write that my work emerges in two parts: in what is put forward here, and in all I have *not* written. And precisely this second part is the important one. That is, the ethical is delineated by my book from within; and I am convinced that it is *strictly* to be delineated *only* in this way. In short, I believe: All that so *many blather* about these days I in my book have delineated by being silent about it" (Wittgenstein 1969, 35).<sup>22</sup> Paul Engelmann, the student of Adolf Loos who collaborated with Wittgenstein on the surpassingly functionalist design of the Vienna home of the philosopher's sister, concludes in his memoir that "Wittgenstein's language is the language of wordless faith" (Engelmann 1967, 135).

This repudiation of the Logical Positivists who first championed the book coincides with Zwicky's own view, stated in a note on the "gravely misrepresented" Positivist view of the *Tractatus*: "Its logical sophistication had convinced them that it must be a defence of the Positivist view that anything which could not be characterized 'scientifically' should be discounted—whereas it was actually an attempt to demonstrate that all things of genuine value utterly superseded the world of 'facts'" (Zwicky 1986, 66). Here too she echoes Engelmann's argument: Wittgenstein "has something of enormous importance in common with the positivists: he draws the line between what we can speak about and what we must be silent about just as they do. The

difference is only that they have nothing to be silent about. Positivism holds—and this is its essence—that what we can speak about is all that matters in life. *Whereas Wittgenstein passionately believes that all that really matters in human life is precisely what, in his view, we must be silent about*” (Engelmann 1967, 97; italics his).

“Whenever we talk about the essence of the world,” Wittgenstein contended in a 1931 lecture, “we talk nonsense” (1980, 110). Of ethical essence above all. In a Vienna Circle discussion reported by Friedrich Waismann, Wittgenstein is said to have remarked, “This running up against the limits of language is *ethics*. I certainly regard it as important that an end be put to all the nonsense uttered about ethics: whether it be a perception, or a value, or whether the good can be defined. In ethics one is always making the attempt to say something that neither does nor ever will strike the essence of the matter” (Wittgenstein 1984d, 68-9).<sup>23</sup> Ray Monk summarizes the claim: “The nonsense that results from trying to say what can only be shown is not only logically untenable, but ethically undesirable” (Monk 1991, 156). Since the *Tractatus* argues that only value-neutral facts can be meaningfully uttered, value is the province strictly of action.

Consonant with the Formalist principle that the language of poetry is autonomous, Wittgenstein noted in a 1947 journal entry that “the work of art wishes to transmit not something other but rather itself” (Wittgenstein 1984b, 533).<sup>24</sup> In an entry 31 years earlier he defines the successful work of art as “the consummate expression” (Wittgenstein 1984, 178).<sup>25</sup> By its very disinterestedness art enjoys privileged access to the ineffable domain of ethics. “Ethics and aesthetics are one and the same,” he states in the *Tractatus* (6.421).<sup>26</sup> The war notebooks make this claim more clearly than the book derived from them. Whereas the *Tractatus* asserts, “Not *how* the world is, is the mystical, but *that* it is” (6.44),<sup>27</sup> the notebook claims: “The aesthetic wonder is that the world exists” (1984, 181).<sup>28</sup>

This identification of ethics and aesthetics, Christopher Bode argues, derives not from “any professed obscurantism, but because they both signify the limits of the sayable, but, as it were, from the other side, from the realm of that which cannot be said, from that which only ‘shows,’ from the realm of *silence*” (Bode 1999, 463). This view is influentially upheld by Wittgenstein’s student Stephen Toulmin in the book he co-authored with Allen Janik, *Wittgenstein’s Vienna*, which Zwicky cites and to whose argument she clearly assents. Situated outside a logically coherent discourse, ethics, they argue, becomes the object “of a kind of mystical insight, which can be conveyed by

‘indirect’ or poetical communication . . . Wittgenstein is trying to set off the ethical from the sphere of rational discourse,” they write, “because he believes that it is more properly located in the sphere of the poetic” (Janik and Toulmin 1973, 191 and 193).

By situating art in the sphere of the shown (in the Symbolist terms to which he is indebted, the intimated and intuitive) rather than the stated, Wittgenstein gives poetry the sanction for Zwicky, at odds with academic philosophy, to recuperate truth. The poem would forgo the prospect of some universal ethical scheme translated into verifiable propositions in favour of aesthetic intuitions of unity. Yet Zwicky nevertheless is sorely tempted to venture direct statement. Whereas Wittgenstein advances an antifoundationalist argument for belief as a “system of relations” (*Bezugs-system*), Zwicky aspires to expressible transcendent pattern and the articulation of an ethics. Apparently refreshed at last “by the breath of God,” she is vouchsafed a “vision” (62) that allows her to hazard a tentative yet bold statement of the “inexpressible.” Although she resigns herself to “steadiness of soul,” “courage,” “exactness,” and “love” (61), these become hypostatized states, themselves essences. Hence too her many allusions, here as elsewhere,<sup>29</sup> to the stars, the classic eidictic form of Platonic hypostatization.

Zwicky’s elegiac intimations all but issue in ethical mandates. The book culminates in a paradoxical utterance of the unutterable: “Perhaps what is inexpressible is this”:

The huge faint height beyond the shadowed heart  
Against which we must measure lives,  
the possibility of truth.

Against which, only,  
Death might mean,  
the emptied voice

at last begin to speak. (63)

The ineffable yields to the effable, almost. The parataxis in fact finally shrouds as much as it discloses: the tropes are Delphic, the syntax fragmentary and elliptical, and the mood conditional. Poised as the mist begins to fall. And so, if only just barely, Zwicky resists translating her descriptions into doctrine.

“When one does not strain to express the inexpressible, *nothing* gets lost,” Wittgenstein wrote to Engelmann while drafting the *Tractatus*—a passage Zwicky herself quotes in *Lyric Philosophy*. “Rather, the inexpressible is—inexpressibly—*contained* in the expressed” (Engelmann 1967, 6; see Zwicky

1992, 371).<sup>30</sup> With this in mind Cora Diamond argues that, despite its axiomatic reasoning, the *Tractatus* is anything but didactic: “to take Wittgenstein’s book philosophically will not be to learn from anything it says but to use it in transforming one’s understanding” (Diamond 2004, 129).

Although a highly figurative and tentative statement of a possible truth, Zwicky’s poem almost defies Wittgenstein’s interdiction. It strains to express the inexpressible. Just here, then, after a waiting full of listening, when after a fashion Wittgenstein at last appears before her as he had been unable to appear before Trakl, when in an elegiac sense Wittgenstein appears *as* her, his Galway cabin co-extensive with the space of her own Canadian one, just here he withdraws, as though to release her to the nascent authority of her own voice. “Rosro” becomes the clear, still space of elegiac resonance:

The voices, layered voices, shimmer  
Brilliant, chafing, lapping over one another,  
Echo in the salt light. Great twisted rope,  
The vision we will ride in flight  
Above the twilight world. (62)

The plural pronoun is an elegiac compound of Trakl’s and Wittgenstein’s voices, enriched by Rilke’s own, with those of the poet’s unnamed dead. United by “all that we have valued,” they emit occult echoes of the “harmony” between ethics and aesthetics that the *Wittgenstein Elegies* commends.

#### NOTES

\* Translations from the German are my own.

- 1 Rosmarie Waldrop’s *The Reproduction of Profiles* includes parodies of the *Tractatus* and is arranged in the discrete paragraphs of his later writings, wryly adapting Wittgenstein’s accounts of ordinary language to the experience of gender. The aphorisms of Ron Silliman’s “The Chinese Notebook” (from *The Age of Huts*) similarly echo and parody Wittgenstein’s form and phrasing, while Steve McCaffery’s *Evoba: The Investigation Meditations* takes its point of departure (and its palindrome title) from the section on reading in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Lyn Hejinian accumulates Wittgensteinian inventories of curiously opaque ordinary language in much of her verse of that time. In later texts such as “The Composition of the Cell” (from *The Cold of Poetry*), which adopts the numbering scheme of the *Tractatus*, she pays tribute to the antifoundationalist Wittgenstein for whom the ego is a part of speech, a convention of grammar no more stable than the language games in which it operates. By contrast with Hejinian, Zwicky does not jeopardize her pronouns. The continuity of self and other is jeopardized rather by the mechanical centrifuge of “the world,” indeed by much the same forces that alarmed Rainer Maria Rilke in the *Sonnets to Orpheus*: haste, machinery, the cash nexus, and mass culture.

- 2 Hejinian, whose two versions of *My Life* travesty the egotistical sublime of Wordsworth's versions of *The Prelude*, for example repudiates the idea that the poem is "an expression uttered in the artist's "own voice," issuing from an inner, fundamental, sincere, essential, irreducible, consistent self" (Hejinian 1991, 166). Fostered by a postmodernist reading of Wittgenstein, the Language poets deny the very possibility of a transcendental subject. The *Tractatus* is their touchstone: "Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt . . . Das Subjekt gehört nicht zur Welt, sondern es ist eine Grenze der Welt" (*Tractatus* 5.6 and 5.632; Wittgenstein 1984, 67 and 68). ["*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world . . . The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world.*"] The first person pronoun is foremost a word like any other; the subject cannot transcend (or suspend) discourse to speak meaningfully of itself or of a world independent of it; language cannot be used to get between language and its objects. "Das Ich ist kein Gegenstand," Wittgenstein jotted in the *Tractatus* notebook (7 August 1916; Wittgenstein 1984, 175). ["I is not an object."] Later he lectured that the first person pronoun could be omitted from statements of experience (see Wittgenstein 2001, 22 and 65). He argues that the "I" is not a demonstrative, that "personality" is a word with many uses, and that "mind" has a contingent use in our language that does not indicate what use we make of the word (Wittgenstein 1960, 68, 62, and 69-70). Statements of identity have no ontological privilege, but function within an acquired, rather than inculcated, "system of relations" or *Bezugssystem* (see *On Certainty* #83, Wittgenstein 1984b, 136). From it emerges a *Weltbild*, a "world picture" maintained not because it is verifiable, rather because "it is the prevailing background, upon which I distinguish between true and false" ["Aber mein Weltbild habe ich nicht, weil ich mich von seiner Richtigkeit überzeugt habe; auch nicht, weil ich von seiner Richtigkeit überzeugt bin. Sondern es ist der überkommene Hintergrund, auf welchem ich zwischen wahr und falsch unterscheide"] (*On Certainty* #94; (Wittgenstein 1984b,139).

Allen Thiher asserts that, in Wittgenstein's critique, the self "is only a kind of abbreviation for talking about the multiple ways in which voices enter into language games. Or, if taken as a substantial notion, the self can only be viewed as a metaphysical error arising from a misunderstanding about the nature of language. There is no self to be spoken, no inner locus that is the source of meaning, for the locus of speaking is merely speaking itself" (Thiher 1983, 81-82). The self as mere "metaphysical error" has no place in Zwicky's ethos, or in her understanding of Wittgenstein's. It is just this poststructuralist interpretation that the *Wittgenstein Elegies*, like all Zwicky's subsequent writings on the subject, would counter.

- 3 "Ich möchte sagen, 'dieses Buch sei zur Ehre Gottes geschrieben,' aber das wäre heute eine Schurkerei, d.h. es würde nicht richtig verstanden werden. Es heißt, es ist in gutem Willen geschrieben und so weit es nicht mit gutem Willen, also aus Eitelkeit etc., geschrieben, soweit möchte der Verfasser es verurteilt wissen" (Vorwort, *Philosophische Bemerkungen*, Wittgenstein 1984c, 7). ["I should like to say, 'this book is written to the glory of God,' but today that would be roguery, that is, it would not be rightly understood. It means, the book is written in good will, and to the extent that it is written not in good will but rather from vanity, etc., the author would like to see it condemned."]
  - 4 Ficker forwarded to Wittgenstein a letter of gratitude and, apparently, a manuscript of verse from Rilke. From his Krakow military post Wittgenstein replied to Ficker on February 13, 1915: "Rilkes Schreiben an Sie hat mich gerührt und tief erfreut. Die Zuneigung jedes edlen Menschen ist ein Halt in dem labilen Gleichgewicht meines Lebens.

Ganz unwürdig bin ich des herrlichen Geschenkes, das ich als Zeichen und Andenken dieser Zuneigung am Herzen trage. Könnten Sie Rilke meinen tiefsten Dank und meine treue *Ergebenheit* übermitteln!" (Wittgenstein 1969, 27) ["Rilke's writing to you moved and deeply pleased me. The attachment of every noble person is a support in the unstable balance of my life. I am wholly unworthy of the glorious gift that I bear in my heart as a token and memento of this attachment. Could you convey to Rilke my deepest thanks and my faithful devotion!"] The next paragraph identifies the precise location of Trakl's grave.

- 5 *Lyric Philosophy*, for instance, includes a complete quotation from, and translation of, "Archaic Torso of Apollo," as well as a passage from Rilke's correspondence (see Zwicky 1992, 72 and 219). Zwicky also quotes from Rilke's poetry in the essay "Brighurst's Presocratics: Lyric and Ecology" as the epitome of lyrical "beauty" that issues from "enactive complexity" and "intensity" (see Zwicky 1995, 87). In addition to oblique allusion her poetry also makes direct reference to Rilke (see below, Endnote 7).
- 6 "Erst im Doppelbereich/ werden die Stimmen/ ewig und mild." (*Sonnets to Orpheus* I, IX)
- 7 The Blue Rider group promulgated an anti-materialist, indeed mystical aesthetic of the "vibration" (*Schwingung*). In the 1911 *Almanach "Der Blaue Reiter"* (e.g. "On Stage Composition") Vassily Kandinsky links revelatory perception to undefinable yet particular aesthetic vibrations; these constitute subtle mental processes, the sum of which achieves a spiritual refinement that for Kandinsky is the proper aim of art (see Kandinsky and Marc 2004, esp. 189-92).

In his letter to Witold von Hulewicz, Rilke uses the term to explain the *Duino Elegies*: "Die 'Elegien' zeigen uns an diesem Werke, am Werke dieser fortwährenden Umsetzungen des geliebten Sichtbaren und Greifbaren in die unsichtbare Schwingung und Erregtheit unserer Natur, die neue Schwingungszahlen einführt in die Schwingungs-Sphären des Universums" (Rilke 1935, 335). ["The *Elegies* show us at this task, the task of these perpetual transpositions of the loved visible and tangible things into the invisible vibration and agitation of our nature, which introduces new frequencies into the universe's spheres of vibration."]

It is from this letter, where Rilke characterizes human beings as "die Bienen des Unsichtbaren" that Zwicky quotes in "Kant and Bruckner: Twelve Variations," in *Songs for Relinquishing the Earth*: "Bees of the invisible" (Zwicky 1998, 21).

- 8 Guy Davenport's novella "The Dawn in Erewhon" (from *Tatlin!*) composed as the notebook of a fictitious Dutch philosopher compounded out of Wittgenstein, Heraclitus, and Buckminster Fuller, is quoted three times in *Lyric Philosophy*, for which Davenport provided a blurb. Zwicky's thinking on the Presocratics, Wittgenstein, and on philosophical prose more generally is indebted as well to Davenport's essays and fiction.
- 9 "Philosophie dürfte man eigentlich nur *dichten*" (undated 1933-34 entry collected in *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, Wittgenstein 1984b, 483). Marjorie Perloff notes that poetry in this view is not "the *expression* or externalization of inner feeling; it is, more accurately, the critique of that expression" (Perloff 1996, 184). In a later essay she argues that "what makes philosophy poetic is its potential for invention, its status as what we now call *conceptual art*," that is, a cognitive rather than textural art (Perloff 2004, 43).

Philosophy as *Dichtung* also need not rest on explicit conclusions or summary meanings, as indeed none of Wittgenstein's works after the *Tractatus* do. One of Wittgenstein's targets in *The Blue and Brown Notebooks* is the very notion of an intransitive literary meaning susceptible to paraphrase, as Severin Schroeder elucidates: "Naturally one would like to account for a literary work's *Meaning*, its aesthetically valuable characteristics, and



so one does explain the work's *meaning*—its content. Failing to distinguish between the two, one easily slides from one to the other: from the Meaning one should like to explain to the meaning one knows how to explain" (Schroeder 2001, 224). Although it may well feel like such a "Meaning" is available to summary, "the experience is an illusion" (226). This effect Wittgenstein orchestrates for his philosophical writings.

- 10 The title invokes both Augustine's *Confessions*, a work of great importance to Wittgenstein, and the non-extant confession Wittgenstein wrote and circulated in the 1930s.
- 11 "Philosophy is a struggle against the bewitchment of our understanding by means of our language" (*Philosophical Investigations* #109). ["Die Philosophie ist ein Kampf gegen die Verhexung unsres Verstands durch die Mittel unserer Sprache" (Wittgenstein 1984, 299).]
- 12 This "reach" stands midway between "the reach" of reuniting hands in "Aliment" (Zwicky 1982, 9), and the relinquished search for an ideal language in "The Geology of Norway": "I came / to find a word, the perfect / syllable, to make it reach up, / grab meaning by the throat / and squeeze it till it spoke to me" (Zwicky 1998, 34).
- 13 Zwicky shuns not only the formal experimentation that Wittgenstein's linguistic thinking invites, but the biographical meditation that the traditional lyric encourages. Wittgenstein's sojourn at Rosro has inspired not only Terry Eagleton's novel *Saints and Scholars* but also poets. Richard Murphy, for instance, meditates in "The Philosopher and the Birds" (in *Sailing to an Island*, 1968) on Wittgenstein's Galway seclusion and rapport with sea birds, while another Irish poet, Francis Harvey, evokes in the 1988 sonnet "Wittgenstein" (in *The Rainmakers*) the conflict between austerity and desire in Wittgenstein's life. Such details no more influence Zwicky's poem than do the implications of his critique of language for the style of its verse.
- 14 "Wir stritten über Religion, / Aber immer wie zwei Spielgefährten, // Und bereiteten Gott von Mund zu Mund. / Im Anfang war das Wort. // Des Dichters Herz, eine feste Burg, / Seine Gedichte: Singende Thesen. // Er war wohl Martin Luther." ("Georg Trakl," Lasker-Schüler 1966, 256) ["We argued over religion, / But always as two playmates, // And we prepared God from mouth to mouth. / In the beginning was the word. // The poet's heart, a firm citadel, / His poems: Singing theses. // He was indeed Martin Luther."]
- 15 Wittgenstein wrote to Ficker that Trakl had died of heart-failure. "Es widerstrebte mir, mich auf diese Nachricht hin noch weiter nach Umständen zu erkundigen, wo doch das einzig Wichtige schon gesagt war" (Wittgenstein 1969, 21). ["It was repugnant to me to make further inquiries into the circumstances of this news, where indeed the only thing of importance had already been said."]
- 16 "What poetry can do," Joachim Schulte explains, "is to put the expressible in such a way that something not expressible by ordinary uses of words is suggested to those readers who are alive to its allusions and can grasp and perhaps reproduce them in a fashion that makes the signs come alive" (Schulte 2004, 161).
- 17 "Anwendung allein zeigt wie ein Wort funktioniert" (1984, 387). See also Wittgenstein 1984, 398 and 413; 1960, 157; and 2001, 28 and 61.
- 18 "At the basis of the grounded belief lies the ungrounded belief," Wittgenstein asserts in *On Certainty* #253. ["Am Grunde des begründeten Glaubens liegt der unbegründete Glaube" (Wittgenstein 1984b, 170).]
- 19 This remains so in Zwicky's later poetry, in particular the dramatic monologue "The Geology of Norway." Again she situates Wittgenstein in a remote cabin, this time his

fjord retreat. On the eve of departure from Norway in December 1937, he reflects on the futility of having attempted in the *Tractatus* to posit an inviolate realm of meaningful discourse:

I wanted language  
to hold me still, to be a rock,  
I wanted to become a rock myself. I thought  
if I could find, and say,  
the perfect word, I'd nail  
mind to the world, and find  
release. (Zwicky 1998, 34-5)

Philosopher and poet converge in the lament that, affording no fixed access to the real, language will not deliver us. (The convergence is reinforced by the poem's anachronisms, which Zwicky admits in her preface to the poem's publication in the *Harvard Review of Philosophy*: the poem's speaker "is apparently familiar with both poststructuralist narratology and plate tectonics, neither of which was really on the scene when Wittgenstein died in 1951" [Zwicky 1999, 30].) As Zwicky's source, biographer Ray Monk notes, Wittgenstein had been trying to argue at this time against logicism that conventions, not Platonic essences, furnish the criteria for the validity of propositions (see Monk 1991, 380-84). In Zwicky's poem, Idea yields to Hap, and even rock proves unstable. Geological flux compresses human time into a thin stratum of schist floating on the continental drift. Fixity is merely the work of entropy, the cooled magma of a dead planet: "Then weather, light, / and gravity / will be the only things that move" (36). In contrast to a phlegmatic Don McKay, whose "Quartz Crystal" cheerfully anticipates the relinquishment of every last trace of the human (see McKay 2003, 9-10), Zwicky mourns the inexorability of geological epochs. Language itself belongs merely to a brief phase of the planet's unimaginable history. When all that persists on earth will be stone, deserts, and tide, Zwicky can only ask, "Will they have a name for us?" (36) Certainly not. Meanwhile McKay, in another of the *Varves* poems, confronts petrification with teasing rhetorical questions that seem to mock Zwicky's plaint: "Fixed, / you stiffen in the arms of wonder's dark / undomesticated sister. Can't you name her / and escape?" Certainly not: "You are the momentary mind of rock" (McKay 2003, 11). Like the other poems of *Varves*, "Quartz Crystal" read like replies to "The Geology of Norway." Where Zwicky, for instance, speaks of the thwarted yearning for a "language / that could bend light" (33), McKay's crystal already triumphantly does so, "bending the light from a dying star" (McKay 2003, 10).

For an ecocritical comparison of Zwicky and McKay proposing a less desolate account of "The Geology of Norway," see Dickinson 2004, esp. pp. 42-5.

- 20 "Die richtige Methode der Philosophie wäre eigentlich die: Nichts zu sagen, als was sich sagen läßt, also Sätze der Naturwissenschaft—also etwas, was mit Philosophie nichts zu tun hat—, und dann immer, wenn ein anderer etwas Metaphysisches sagen wollte, ihm nachzuweisen, daß er gewissen Zeichen in seinen Sätzen keine Bedeutung gegeben hat" (Wittgenstein 1984, 85).
- 21 "Es gibt allerdings Unaussprechliches. Dies *zeigt* sich, es ist das Mystische" (Wittgenstein 1984, 85).
- 22 "Ich wollte nämlich schreiben, mein Werk bestehe aus zwei Teilen: aus dem, der hier vorliegt, und aus alledem, was ich *nicht* geschrieben habe. Und gerade dieser zweite Teil ist der Wichtige. Es wird nämlich das Ethische durch mein Buch gleichsam von Innen her

begrenzt; und ich bin überzeugt, daß es, *streng, nur* zu begrenzen ist. Kurz, ich glaube: Alles das, was *viele* heute *schwefeln*, habe ich in meinem Buch festgelegt, indem ich darüber schweige" (Wittgenstein 1969, 35).

- 23 "Dieses Anrennen gegen die Grenze der Sprache ist die *Ethik*. Ich halte es für sicher wichtig, daß man all dem Geschwätz über Ethik—ob es eine Erkenntnis gebe, ob es Werte gebe, ob sich das Gute definieren lasse usw.—ein Ende macht. In der Ethik macht man immer den Versuch, etwas zu sagen, was das Wesen der Sache nicht betrifft und nie betreffen kann."
- 24 "Das Kunstwerk will nicht *etwas anderes* übertragen, sondern sich selbst" (1984c, 533).
- 25 "Das gute Kunstwerk ist der vollendete Ausdruck" (1984, 178).
- 26 "(Ethik und Aesthetik sind Eins.)" (1984, 83)
- 27 "Nicht *wie* die Welt ist, ist das Mystische, sondern *daß* sie ist" (1984, 84).
- 28 "Das künstlerische Wunder ist, daß es die Welt gibt" (1984, 181).
- 29 In "Things Present" (from *Where Have We Been*), for instance, Zwicky enjoins the lover to hear the faint "voices" of the stars (Zwicky 1982, 38).
- 30 "Wenn man sich nicht bemüht das Unaussprechliche auszusprechen, so geht *nichts* verloren. Sondern das Unaussprechliche ist, —unaussprechlich—in dem Ausgesprochenen *enthalten*."

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# Lake Nipissing

*for my parents*

February stands up  
in our sleep, its foot  
hard to the lake's lip;

Tilting mirror,

its shadow  
quarters a moon

and bares empty  
palm-prints  
on the lake-bottom

where swallows wintered once,

anciently,  
we thought.

# Brainworkers:

## The Middle-Class Labour Reformer and the Late-Victorian Canadian Industrial Novel

**A**lthough Canada began to feel the social and economic stresses created by the industrial revolution later than both Britain and the United States, by the 1870s problems such as rural dislocation, urban slums, and the development of a dissatisfied urban working class were evident. The National Policy (1879), with its protectionist agenda and pro-industry ambitions, furthered the swell of urban industry and commercial growth. While factories had been a part of the urban landscape for some time, under the new government policy “they became an important feature of Canadian life” (Waite 342). Industrial expansion was thus fundamentally linked to the act of nation-building. Because the National Policy sought to stimulate Canadian industries, it “committed the country to industrial urban expansion as rapidly as world economic conditions would allow” (Watt 458). Indeed, as Paul Rutherford notes, one of the main sources of opposition to the National Policy was the “fear that the tariff would foster the very kind of excessive industrialization which had resulted in the degradation of New York, Chicago, and other American manufacturing centres” (xv). The Macdonald government’s response to the industrial stress and excesses of the 1870s and 1880s was to initiate a series of investigations, including studies of manufacturing conditions in 1882 and 1885. The reports contained disturbing information on the use of child and female labourers and the poor sanitary and safety conditions of the factories; however, no legislation was passed for the protection of workers or the regulation of industries despite the fact that “Factory acts were introduced at nearly every session of the federal parliament in the eighties” (Kealey *Canada* ix). At the

same time, new unions were organized and union membership increased in such international labour organizations as the American-based Knights of Labor.<sup>1</sup>

The status of the working poor became the subject of polemical writing in both the labour and the popular press, and some of the most determined supporters of the cause of labour were middle-class intellectuals, or “brainworkers,” who undertook a specific kind of intellectual labour on behalf of the cause of physical labourers. Christina Burr observes that brainworkers were radical intellectuals “whose role was to educate . . . working men and women about the problems of capitalist accumulation at the expense of others, and thereby bring about social change. This task involved nothing less than a complete and radical change in sentiment and habits of thought among male workers who had been taught to ‘exalt money before manhood’” (54). Although the “labour question”<sup>2</sup> was emerging as a prominent concern in this period, only a handful of Canadian novels offer sustained examinations of the industrial milieu, and of the role and character of organized labour. Two such works, *Roland Graeme: Knight* (1892) by Agnes Maule Machar (1837-1927), and *The Preparation of Ryerson Embury* (1900) by Albert Richardson Carman (1865-1939), reflect the growing concern among Canadian middle-class intellectuals with the necessity for middle-class participation and engagement with the labour question. They share this focus on middle-class roles and responsibilities with mid-Victorian social problem novelists like Gaskell, Dickens, Kingsley, Disraeli, and Eliot. Like their earlier British counterparts, Machar and Carman caution against violent revolution and instead preach a doctrine of reconciliation and compromise, rooted in a reorientation of conventional notions of justice, a rejuvenation of social institutions, and the imperative of individual moral responsibility. Both Canadian novelists focus on the figure of the intellectual middle-class labour reformer, and the process of his education about the labour question. Both novels are explicitly Christian, and spend much of their respective narratives exploring the protagonists’ crisis of faith, before ultimately making a connection between the rejuvenation of the Christian spirit and the vitality of the labour reform movement. Religion is thus directly connected to the more radical subject matter of strikes, unions, and labour activity.<sup>3</sup> Both narratives invoke the image of the Knights of Labor as a model of gradualist reform, working-class activity, and chivalric idealism. Roland and Ryerson accept the Knights’ argument for the necessary education of the working classes and adopt the role of the brainworker who labours in the cause of



reform. The young men's identity as brainworkers is reflected in both novels' focus on the role of education, as the heroes are shown reading from the leading works of economic reform of the period, including, most prominently, Henry George's 1879 treatise, *Progress and Poverty*, and assimilating their acquired knowledge into their work as labour advocates. The novels reflect the concern with social justice issues that Machar and Carman also explored in their non-fiction writing from the same period. The authors' polemical writing echoes this sense of the relation between Christian fellow-feeling and labour activism. Examining the novels' focus on the role of the middle-class intellectual and their authors' own political engagement with labour issues reveals the role of the brainworker in late-nineteenth century labour reform fiction and in the real-life struggle.

### A Modern Crusade

Born in Kingston, Ontario, where she spent most of her life, Machar was a prolific writer whose concerns ranged broadly across the spectrum of life in Victorian Canada. Raised in "an environment that was both religious and intellectual" (Gerson 9)<sup>4</sup>, she received a private education at home under the tutelage of her father, a Scottish-born minister who was principal of Queen's University from 1846-1854. She was a determined social critic and a firm nationalist who was engaged in most of the lively debates of the day. Her causes included the welfare and status of labourers, the education of women, temperance, nationalism, and the humane treatment of animals. The indefatigable Machar produced poetry, novels, biographies, histories, and children's stories, as well as numerous articles in Canadian and international periodicals during a career that spanned five decades, in the process "earn[ing] a name for herself as one of Canada's best-loved literary nationalists" (Fiamengo 17). Although her fiction is decidedly anti-modern, characterized as it is by an earnest didacticism, Christian morality, and faith in the divine destiny of the British empire, Machar remains a fascinating figure whose breadth of intellectual inquiry secures her central position among the influential writers of late-Victorian Canada. As Ramsay Cook notes, Machar was "one of the most gifted intellectuals and social critics in late nineteenth-century Canada" (186).

In her 1892 novel, *Roland Graeme: Knight*, Machar united many of the themes she had explored (and would continue to treat<sup>5</sup>) in her non-fiction writing. Two essays from the beginning of 1891, "Voices Crying in the Wilderness" (*The Week*, 13 February 1891) and "Our Lady of the Slums"

(*The Week*, 13 March 1891), demonstrate the range of social concerns that Machar would address in *Roland Graeme: Knight*, including urban poverty, starvation, sanitation, and slums. The essays also reflect Machar's general belief that "class privilege created a debt to be repaid in Christian service" (Hallman 30). In these articles, Machar articulates a role for Christian social reformers (with a particular emphasis on the role of women) in remaking the world. Referring to "our common Christianity, whose foundation-stone is love" ("Voices" 169), Machar begins with the premise that her reading audience shares her strong faith. She argues that if the church recognized "that the command, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,' was, by the highest authority, inseparably bound up with the other, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart'" ("Voices" 169), there would not be "the spectacle of capital endeavouring everywhere to screw down the receipts of a labourer to the minimum for which men, otherwise starving, can be induced to work" or "the complementary spectacle of labour everywhere organizing to free from the reluctant grasp of capital a fairer share of the profits that labour toils to gain" ("Voices" 169). Machar's sense of Christian responsibility is revealed in her stark query: "Is it not time that easy-going, self-indulgent Christians should be confronted with the question, in tones as stern as those of an Amos or an Isaiah: 'What are you going to do about it?'" ("Voices" 170). As Hallman observes, "Machar was no mere commentator on social conditions; she always tried to connect thought with action" (30), and this rhetorical question reflects her belief that principles must be sustained by action.<sup>6</sup>

In her non-fiction writing, as in her fiction, Machar defends the workers' right to unionization. As she observes, "One thing . . . in which all true friends of the working classes will agree [with General Booth and "Father" Huntington<sup>7</sup>] is in the approval of the principle of co-operation and organization among workmen, as absolutely necessary to protect their rights in these days of 'combines' of capital" ("Voices" 170). A month later, she reiterates the same point, noting that "the principle of cooperation" among the workers is one "which should be looked upon as the natural and legitimate complement of the use of the same principle by the capitalists with so much advantage to themselves" ("Our Lady" 235). Machar remarks that despite the clear Christian imperative to support the working class in their struggle for survival "there are many who look askance at the organization of the workman; at his 'strike' for fair wages and a sufficient livelihood, who seem to feel no such disapproval of the combination of rich employers to fleece the public! It is the world's way with 'the under dog in the fight.' And

the Church has been too much like the world” (“Voices” 170). Machar emphasizes in her essays, as she later will in *Roland Graeme*, that “the service of God on earth is actually the service of man” (“Our Lady” 234). Her novel thus reflects the serious social subjects upon which Machar expounded in her non-fiction writing.

In *Roland Graeme: Knight*, Machar focuses on the labour question, and, through it, on the woman question. Other topical subjects such as temperance and sanitation also emerge as strong concerns. *Roland Graeme* tells the story of a young Canadian social reformer who starts a small labour journal called *The Brotherhood* in the fictional American town of Minton. Located somewhere in the north-eastern United States, Minton is predominantly a manufacturing town, and many of its poorest citizens suffer from the effects of overwork, malnourishment, and slum housing, effects which Machar reads as symptomatic of unregulated urban industrialism. Shortly after Roland’s arrival in Minton, the idealistic young hero discovers that “there were many wrongs around him calling for redress” (54), and he takes it as his own mission to answer that call.

The novel charts Roland’s development, both as a labour reformer and as a Christian; Machar suggests that these two roles are intimately connected since it is Roland’s status as “a lover of man” (271) that prompts his commitment to social reform. Roland’s evolution is echoed in the development of Nora Blanchard, another visitor to Minton, who is appalled by her discovery of the poverty and misery of the factory workers. It is not her first exposure to industrialization, because her own rural hometown, Rockland, is home to what Machar describes as “model mills” (270), an operation run for profit, but with great attention to the comfort, dignity, and collective well-being of its workers. Rather, it is Nora’s first experience of the effects of *laissez-faire* capitalism, a system in which Social Darwinism becomes the implicit excuse for non-interference. Nora’s strong sense of social justice is roused and she begins to question the starkly apparent inequalities between the classes. Roland and Nora both approach the issue of labour reform from a Christian perspective, a point that Machar reinforces by casting two of the novel’s other characters as ministers: the Reverend Mr. Alden, who practices what he preaches, and the Reverend Mr. Chillingworth, who preaches well, but who cannot implement the Christian philosophy of brotherhood in his own practice. This deeply Christian work, in many ways conventional in tone and style, nevertheless manages to offer a powerful critique of the

relations between labour and capital in the industrial world of the late nineteenth century.

Machar's solution to most of the social ills she represents in *Roland Graeme* is a simple one: she encourages the application of Christian ideals to the various problems of life in the contemporary industrial city. This Christian idealism most often takes the form of the "Golden Rule" which, in its petition to treat others as you would wish yourself to be treated, argues for reciprocal kindness both between friends and strangers. More than the idea of simple fair dealing, however, is Machar's strong sense of one's moral obligation to aid and care for one's fellow citizens. The argument, then, is one of inter-class fraternalism, or "brotherhood," a concept which is central to the rhetoric of nineteenth-century labour reform, and which is promoted by leading mouthpieces of the workingman, such as the Knights of Labor, of which the protagonist is a member.<sup>8</sup> In the regeneration of Christian fellow-feeling, and in the performance of good deeds, Machar sees the potential for a distinctly urban Christian social renewal. Machar's rhetoric in the novel reflects her "[deep commitment] to her Presbyterian heritage" (McKillop 137). Ramsay Cook notes that "What lay at the basis of her thought was her firm conviction that Christianity, once brought into line with contemporary intellectual developments, provided the surest method of both comprehending and reforming modern industrial society" (187). Machar's novel describes the human consequences of urban industrialism and, in so doing, forces her genteel middle-class readership to acknowledge the world of human suffering and need that coexists with their own world of comfort and ease; indeed, her novel pushes the point that even the modest luxury of the middle class is sustained by the work of the labouring classes. The book's subtitle, *A Novel of Today*, clearly orients it as a work engaged with the vexed issues of contemporary society. While it is true, as Nancy Miller Chenier observes, that Machar's fiction is "less daring in any social criticism than her essays" (63), the novel nevertheless offers an indictment of unregulated industrialization.

Machar's belief in the transformative power of Christian cooperation and fellowship, founded on the principles of the Social Gospel movement,<sup>9</sup> is, however, more complicated than it may initially appear. Frank Watt's observation that *Roland Graeme* "preaches not social or political revolution but *noblesse oblige*" (461) is an accurate assessment: the novel's middle-class characters learn to cherish their Christian responsibilities and they endeavour,

through small and seemingly insubstantial gestures, to improve the lives of the town's less-fortunate citizens, while the workers do not seem to have gained any more control over their own collective destiny by the novel's conclusion than they had at its beginning. The phrase *noblesse oblige* ("privilege entails responsibility") captures the tone but perhaps misses the essence of Machar's narrative of Christian-based social reform. She deliberately stops short of allowing her protagonist the satisfaction of seeing his goals of social reorganization achieved, and tempers the dominance of his youthful enthusiasm and idealism by injecting other voices (most notably those of Sandy Dunlop and the Reverend Mr. Alden) that combine "Christian socialism" (10) with Christian patience. Machar's narrative of transformation, of characters awakened to their Christian duty, is simultaneously a narrative of deferral, for the point is made on many occasions that the changes Roland hopes to effect will not be seen within his lifetime. Roland's belief in the benefit of his reform efforts to future generations thus parallels the Christian belief in an afterlife: both are predicated upon faith and deferral, the performing of good works in the present for the benefit of some future blessing. The point is clearly made throughout *Roland Graeme* that change can only occur slowly and gradually; that such change must occur, but that it must be by evolution rather than revolution; and that anarchy from below is just as dangerous and divisive a force as oppression from above. Throughout the novel, Machar argues for the integration of theoretical notions of Christian duty with their practical application. She focuses on the pressing need to rehabilitate society through changing the way her modern Christian readers think, both about religious responsibility and about workers' rights.

### **The Gospel of Justice**

Albert Richardson Carman (1865-1939), born at Belleville, Ontario, was the son of the Reverend Albert Carman, a prominent educationist and long-serving superintendent of the Methodist Church of Canada. Throughout his long journalistic career, Carman authored only two novels, published within several years of each other: *The Preparation of Ryerson Embury: A Purpose* (1900) and *The Pensionnaires; The Story of an American Girl who took a Voice to Europe and Found—Many Things* (1903).<sup>10</sup> This period of novelistic activity is bracketed by Carman's successful career as a journalist. While Carman worked for both the *Toronto Globe* and *Philadelphia Ledger* early in his career, he spent the bulk of his professional life at the *Montreal Star*, where he ultimately became editor-in-chief. His obituary quotes the praises of his

colleagues and of “men prominent in every station of life”: “Canadian journalism has lost an outstanding figure. . . . His contribution to the highest standards of journalism have been second to none . . . Canada loses a brilliant mind” (*Globe and Mail*, 18 October 1939).

While neither of Carman’s novels bears witness to the literary talent implied by this elaborate praise, they do demonstrate his keen power of observation and his eye for telling cultural details. In both novels, Carman relies on stereotypical and quickly drawn secondary characters; however, his creation of the eponymous protagonist in *The Preparation of Ryerson Embury* suggests an effort to create a genuinely complex character. The novel focuses on a period of several years of Ryerson’s life as he completes his university education and embarks on his career, moving from a state of innocent self-absorption, through a series of personal and spiritual tests that eventually transform him into a committed labour advocate and economic reformer. The narrative trajectory in some ways parallels that of *Roland Graeme: Knight*, for both novels chart the development of country boys who have moved to manufacturing towns, both young men experience a crisis of faith early in the narrative, and Ryerson and Roland each must struggle to reconcile his ideas of Christian living with the practice of Christianity he sees around him. *The Preparation of Ryerson Embury* is a novel of education and formation, but rather than witnessing the growth and development of a boy into manhood, the reader witnesses the transformation of an already grown man, still boyish in his thinking, into a deeper maturity as he confronts his experiences of Christianity, ethics, compassion, and sympathy, and makes decisions about the direction of his life and his chosen vocation. Early in the novel, unable to sense the grace of God’s salvation at the spiritual revivals he attends at his local Methodist church, Ryerson resolves to pursue purposeful action rather than introspection, to labour on God’s behalf rather than to repent. His ultimate rejection of the revivals is not, however, a rejection of God, for he commits himself to “God’s service in the world” and is content to act “without any promise from the Deity of salvation” (10).

The novel may be broken into two parts: the first follows Ryerson’s undergraduate career; the second, longer section focuses on his education and experiences in the Free Thought Club and labour activist circles that he begins to frequent as a recent graduate.<sup>11</sup> Carman shows Ryerson’s real social education occurring in the context of a lengthy strike by local workers, during which he moves from a detached observation of their plight to an active engagement with their cause. Through this contrast between Ryerson’s

formal and his informal education, Carman suggests that Ryerson's true intellectual awakening has little connection to what he learns in the college classroom, which is here figured as the realm of abstraction. Instead, Ryerson's self-directed course of study, and his new acquaintance with a working-class family, give him the knowledge he needs to make himself a powerful ally to the workers and to put theory into practice.

In a polemical essay titled "The Gospel of Justice," which appeared in *The Canadian Methodist Quarterly* in 1891, Carman offers a radical critique of the present-day Church, which he would later echo and advance in *The Preparation of Ryerson Embury*.<sup>12</sup> Beginning with the premise that the "masses" of people are no longer drawn to the church as they were in Biblical times, Carman attempts to diagnose the church's failure to appeal to its traditional audience among the "common people" (286). Although he proposes that the opinions he offers are of the world "as one humble soul sees it, speaking with reverent lips" (287), his critique of the modern church is nevertheless a vigorous and stringent one. Carman observes,

Should the suddenly rich, the monopolists, those who have filched the savings of the people, all who live by the labor of others, meet in secret council to frame a religion under which they would like the world to live; what better could they enact than that the oppressed would bear with Christian humility their oppression, and that the wronged would live on with silent lips, looking for right only beyond the grave? And yet that is in practical effect the Gospel heard to-day in many an upholstered pew—the gospel of charity on the part of the rich and humble gratitude on the part of the poor—of exhortation to the rich to give that they may evidence their goodness and of promises to the poor of a fairer distribution of God's mercies in the future life. (287)

His forceful censure here emphasizes two themes that will be treated at fuller length in his fiction almost a decade later: his concern for ineffectual charity, which shifts the focus from real social reform to various palliatives which may ease the social disease of poverty without curing it; and the necessity for justice and fair dealing for the working classes.

Later in this essay, Carman draws a parallel between the modern capitalist and the Biblical Pharisee. Noting that the "Pharisees had made the remarkable mistake of neglecting that part of the old gospel requiring justice between man and man in their holy eagerness to get everybody safely into heaven," he remarks on the "coincidence" that this mistake "redounded to the wealth and power of the neglectful Pharisee. Other grievous burdens . . . came from the same quarter, for the religion of the people had fallen wholly into these corrupt and oppressive hands—hands that, we are told on high

authority, bound heavy burdens and grievous to be borne and laid them on men's shoulders, but would not move them with one of their fingers" (289). This censure directly parallels the critique offered by the Rev. Tommy Tracy in *The Preparation of Ryerson Embury*, who declares to his ideological opponent, the young Rev. Walters: "the Pharisees were the religious leaders of the people. They took upon themselves the responsibility of interpreting God's truth to man. . . . They betrayed that truth; and the merciful Christ, who had condemnation for so few, poured His fiercest indignation upon them. And I believe in my soul that the section of the clergy who this day fail to preach the Gospel of brotherhood, letting the Mastersons [the chief industrialist family] think they are following Jesus when they sweat the poor and divide the spoil with the Church, come under the very condemnation that Christ thundered out on the Scribes and Pharisees" (210).

The article shares another prominent feature with the novel, in that the two are divided between a focus on land reform and on raising workers' wages. In "The Gospel of Justice," Carman notes that the average annual wage of workers in Ontario ("exclusive of brain workers" [295]) is \$420.07. After expenses for food, rent, clothing, and fuel, the average family is left with a little over 50 dollars "for all of life that lifts man above the animal" (295). Carman takes pains to remind his reader that the situation he describes "is not a case of a few of the harder pressed men, but is the average of the workingmen of the Province," adding that "these men—industrious, honest, capable—must furnish their homes, educate their children, pay their taxes, buy any books they get, and purchase such of the bright things of life as they would like their families to enjoy" (295). Rather than advocating an increase in charity, Carman calls upon Biblical evidence to assert that what is truly needed is a Christian approach to economics. "The reason," he maintains, "why the seamstress starves is because she does not get what she earns, and somebody else gets more than he earns; because somebody else steals from her what is hers. . . . The remedy for this case is not charity, but honesty" (295). Carman reflects that true Christianity "is not an alleviation of the ills of life, but a cure. It is not intended to merely patch the fabric here and oil the machinery there, so that this great multiple whole we call the world may grind and creak and blunder on without utter collapse; but it is capable of making out of present materials an ideal world in which every man, woman and child will be just where, in divine justice and infinite love, they ought to be" (293). He further notes that "A Christianity of compromise is a contradiction of terms" (293). "The Gospel of Justice" elucidates the



argument Carman later offers in *The Preparation of Ryerson Embury*, elaborating upon the Biblical evidence which supports Georgeite land reform and clarifying how a thoughtful young Christian could experience a crisis of faith when he or she confronts the disjunction between true Christian ethics and the practice of Christianity in the modern church. As Ryerson reflects after reading *Progress and Poverty*, “If there were a good God, this man [i.e., Henry George] was His prophet. The succour of the poor—the lifting of man out of brutalising environment—was surely the work God would have men do. And the churches? They stood aside with alms in hands which should have borne a sword—they distracted our attention to the next world” (158).

Carman’s novel reflects a powerful concern with education and faith and, in particular, with the necessity for both endeavours to have practical ends. The novel’s setting in a college town and the protagonist’s formal identification as a student foregrounds the weighty role of education in the narrative, something which is further emphasized by the attention given to self-directed programs of study, such as those that the heroine, Grace Brownell, and later Ryerson himself embark upon. The fictional Canadian town of Ithica clearly has a lively intellectual climate. Carman includes references to other forms of self-education, including the papers given and heard by the intellectuals of the Free Thought Club (of which there are two: one at the college and one, apparently more dangerous in its “free thinking,” in the town), and by the workers at the meetings at “Black’s.” Carman also mentions “the popular lectures that the college professors had been giving during the winter at the Mechanics’ Institute” (77) and “a society of scientific research” (26). While Ryerson’s private study initially seems to lead him further away from his once-strong faith, as he questions the authority of the Bible and the Church, he is eventually able to connect his new liberal ideology and secular focus with the more socially engaged form of faith that he sees in the Rev. Tommy Tracy. Both Ryerson and Tracy concentrate on performing good works and take the idea of truth, rather than authority, as a guiding principle. Through the wise counsel of Tracy, a Methodist preacher, and Crawford, a radical Free Thinker, Ryerson is ultimately able to connect the idea of good works with his labour reform agenda, leading him to remark near the novel’s conclusion that Jesus, in his insistence upon the “equality of the human family” (228), thinks like the great American economic reformer, Henry George. Carman does not privilege one kind of knowledge (be it academic or religious knowledge) over the other; rather, he privileges active knowledge, which tends toward praxis, over abstract or

theoretical knowledge, which is content with acquiring knowledge for its own sake. Through Carman's depiction of Ryerson's intellectual and moral education, the narrative suggests the sterility of intellectual debate in the absence of any simultaneous commitment to social action. Carman's preoccupation with the theme of finding one's true vocation arises out of this conviction that knowledge must have practical and social ends.

The spiritual crisis that initiated the novel is resolved in its concluding pages when Ryerson is finally able to reconcile social reform and faith, echoing the doctrine of liberal theology in which "Christ became first and foremost a social revolutionary who attempted to transform, not simply modify, society" (Semple 265). Despite Carman's efforts to craft a complex and realistic character in Ryerson, he remains in many ways a symbolic character, for he embodies the movement toward liberal theology in Methodism. As Neil Semple notes, liberal theology "exalted the intellect and replaced certainty and conformity with a healthy prescription of doubt and questioning" (266). In this sense, the novel functions almost as a *roman à clef* about the necessary future direction of Canadian Methodism. Carman reflects the growing belief at the end of the nineteenth century that Christian teachings require reinterpretation in order "to bring them into closer touch with the requirements of modern man" (Cook 105). Cook observes that such reinterpretation "was part of an effort to discover a social ethic and a political economy that would challenge the injustices of the emerging capitalist industrial order" (105). Carman's focus on good works, rather than spiritual revivals, as the path to salvation echoes a general shift in the Methodist Church away from the precepts that had marked the church of his father, the last Bishop, toward a distinctly modern social and religious agenda. In *The Preparation of Ryerson Embury*, Carman argues for the necessity of action, accountability, and compassion in both public and private life.

Taken together, the fiction and non-fiction writing of these two nineteenth-century Canadian intellectuals suggests both the vitality of the public debate about labour reform, and the broad social interest and significance attributed to the labour question as one of the issues that would define the moral character of the period. Both Machar and Carman approach the labour question as Christian intellectuals, and their sense of the middle class's social responsibility is clearly articulated in both their novels and their essays. These writers suggest that what is needed is not an increase in charity but a rejuvenation of each citizen's sense of moral responsibility. The idea of "brotherhood," emphasized in the writing of both Carman and

Machar, connects the church's rhetoric of spiritual brotherhood to the labour reform movement's emphasis on the practical brotherhood that unites workers and which is manifested in their drive toward combination and unionization. Machar and Carman's own efforts as brainworkers who speak out about the urgent necessity for reform are echoed in their fictional heroes' quest to create a more egalitarian society.

## NOTES

- 1 The Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor, the first important labour organization in the United States, was founded in Philadelphia in 1869 by Uriah S. Stephens. Kealey and Palmer note that the Knights had at least 450 Local Assemblies and 12 District Assemblies across Canada, "making it far and away the largest labor organization in nineteenth-century Canada" (57).
- 2 The labour question may be defined in its simplest form as the enquiry into the cause of social inequality and the debate about its possible remedies. T. Phillips Thompson, perhaps the prototypical Canadian brainworker, interprets the labour question, in its North American context, as "simply the question as to whether America shall in the future be a free democratic land, with equal rights and opportunities, as far as may be, for every citizen—or a country where the many are ruled, as in Europe, by the privileged few" (5).
- 3 Another industrial novel of the period, Robert Barr's *The Mutable Many* (1896), addresses similar social anxieties without, however, seeing a solution to the exploitation of workers in the rejuvenation of Christian fellow-feeling. Barr's hero, an earnest young labour reformer, must navigate the complexities and contradictions revealed during the course of two strikes at a London factory. The novel's cynical ending reflects Barr's secular, rather than spiritual, focus.
- 4 Refer to Carole Gerson's *Three Writers of Victorian Canada* and Dianne M. Hallman's "Cultivating a Love of Canada through History" for more biographical information about Machar.
- 5 Machar would later address the plight of female factory workers in essays such as "Healthy and Unhealthy Conditions of Woman's Work" (*The Week* [27 March 1896]: 421-22) and "The Unhealthy Conditions of Woman's Work in Factories" (*The Week* [8 May 1896]: 566-69).
- 6 Machar clearly believed that the written word could inspire action. In her review of *In Darkest England*, she notes that General Booth's exhortation to his readers to aid the poor of London "has penetrated to the Christian conscience generally [as] is clear from the prompt response accorded to his plan for rescue" ("Our Lady" 234).
- 7 Machar's characterization of Roland echoes her description of the radical Reverend J.O.S. Huntington, an Episcopalian minister from New York, who was also a Knight of Labor and Georgeite. Machar comments that the "deep impression" he produces upon his audience is due, "in great measure, to his own passionate realization of the brotherhood of man—not as a mere poetical figure, but as a solemn truth—and also of the untold misery of a large mass of suffering humanity—produced, in a great measure, by the unbrotherly conduct of many—even of those who 'profess and call themselves Christians'" ("Voices" 169).

- 8 Roland's designation in the title as "Knight" refers to his membership in this prominent labour organization.
- 9 Proponents of the Social Gospel believed that Christian principles could be applied to remedy current social and industrial conflicts. Cook notes that the Social Gospel movement "was not merely a response to a perceived social crisis. It was also, perhaps principally, a reaction to a profound intellectual crisis, and as part of that a questioning of the role of the clergy and the church in modern society" (Cook 174-75).
- 10 Carman also contributed dozens of essays and sketches to periodicals including *The Canadian Magazine*, *Canadian Methodist Magazine*, and *The Canadian Methodist Quarterly*.
- 11 In Canada, the free-thought movement (propagated by secularists and agnostics, who debated various facets of religious and scientific knowledge) flourished, particularly in the 1880s when local societies were organized in Toronto, Welland, St. Thomas, Aylmer, Gananoque, Napanee, Ottawa and Belleville (Cook 52). Carman may have had some exposure to the Belleville group during his time at Albert College.
- 12 Cook attributes this radical essay to Carman's deeply conservative father, Albert Carman senior, the one-time bishop and long-serving superintendent of the Methodist Church (119, 192). The confusion between the two men is natural given their virtually identical names. However, since the authorship is attributed to Albert R. Carman (and Carman consistently used his middle initial in all of his writing, presumably to distinguish himself from his like-named father), the essay is more likely to be the work of the son. This differentiation helps to reconcile some of the more radical aspects of the essay with the identity of its author, for Albert R. Carman continued to espouse these ideas (and, indeed, called upon the same Biblical evidence) to support his argument for social reform in *The Preparation of Ryerson Embury*.

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## baiting hooks

baiting hooks  
the twins flick the heads  
of wriggling minnows

silver scales flail in the air  
attracting blackflies

blood is up for grabs  
in the summer heat

wind mixes with yellow fire  
howls over the lip  
of father's corona

he stuffs a lime down the neck  
to adjust the pitch  
traps his thumb

laughter shakes the twins'  
warm bodies closer

they drop their hooks  
for anything that will bite

## Sameness and Difference: Border Crossings in *The Stone Diaries* and *Larry's Party*

In *When Words Deny the World*, Stephen Henighan characterizes Carol Shields' *The Stone Diaries*, winner of the Governor General's Award and the Pulitzer Prize, as "the flagship novel of Free Trade Fiction" (184). Henighan argues that this border-crossing text "preach[es] an untroubled, ahistorical North Americanism in which Canadians placidly assimilate into continental (i.e., US) norms," and that "it can hardly be a coincidence that this book was one of the most popular works of fiction in both Canada and the US, particularly among wealthy professionals, during the months in which NAFTA was implemented" (184). Examining the significance of border crossings in both *The Stone Diaries* (1993) and *Larry's Party* (1997), I argue rather that Shields interrogates the circulation of cultural power across the Canada-US border, addressing relations of sameness and difference and hospitality and hostility. Both novels feature border-crossing protagonists who are positioned variously as hosts and guests at different times in different countries. These texts also question the difference the border makes, invoking stereotypically American images of Canada only to undercut them, exposing the imbalance of power on which they are based.

Although I diverge from Henighan's view that *The Stone Diaries* endorses Canadian assimilation into US norms, his invocation of North Americanism and trade, particularly as they provoke debates about continental sameness, is valuable. These novels puncture this posited sameness and demonstrate the discrepancy in cultural and economic power between these two nation-states. Further, *Larry's Party* gestures towards issues of trade through Larry's cross-border relocations according to professional opportunity. Set in the

two decades between 1977 and 1997, *Larry's Party* takes place during intense discussion and implementation of trade agreements in North America. Although the novel does not explicitly mention these agreements, it repeatedly invokes the "postmodern world order transformation" (Deibert 111) in which global economics and communications combine to alter structures of political authority. *Larry's Party* traces the relation between production and consumption, creating a narrative undercurrent in line with some concerns about these agreements and locating Canada within global economics. Although the postmodern world order transformation implies a weakening nation-state authority, *Larry's Party* subtly reinserts the nation-state within the transforming world order as it continues *The Stone Diaries*' project of exposing imbalances of national power.

Borders, as Gloria Anzaldúa observes, are designed "to distinguish *us* from *them*" (25). Anzaldúa's focus is the US-Mexico border, "where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (25), demonstrating a brutal juxtaposition of economic prosperity and deprivation operating alongside the generally perceived linguistic and ethnic divide. In contrast, the Canada-US border, traditionally celebrated as the world's longest undefended border, apparently makes less difference. But as Eli Mandel asserts, "the border between America and Canada is of enormous importance in the imaginative life of any Canadian" (105). This significance extends to the nation's identity: "the border is central to Canada's self-awareness, because it is a part of Canada's own image as well of the image that America reflects back to Canada" (Brown 12). The border's distinguishing "us" from "them" implicates the US in constructions of Canadianness. That the reflected image projects "the fundamental likeness of both countries" (Sadowski-Smith 8) frustrates the process of distinction.

Russell Brown notes that statements of Canadian difference from the United States underpin assertions of Canadian identity, and that "because America has so long provided a useful defining contrast, . . . Canadians can say a border defines them" (4). *The Stone Diaries* and *Larry's Party* interrogate the slippage between sameness and difference and the significance of the border. They depart from other Canadian novels, such as Mordecai Richler's *St. Urbain's Horseman*, Robert Kroetsch's *Gone Indian*, Janette Turner Hospital's *Borderline*, and Jane Urquhart's *The Whirlpool*, which, as Brown notes, present Canada-US border-crossing "as literally, as well as psychologically, difficult" (10). Clark Blaise describes this crossing more darkly, claiming, "Each Canadian emigrant must come to America prepared



to die a subtle, psychic death" (4). Writing of *The Stone Diaries*, Gordon E. Slethaug emphasizes "the various dislocations [Daisy] endured in moving from place to place in Canada and the United States" (72-73), but in fact, the experience of dislocation goes unrepresented. Just as Daisy and her father are poised to cross the border, leaving Winnipeg following Cuyler's job offer from the Indiana Limestone Company, the narrative jumps ahead eleven years to the chapter, "Marriage, 1927." The narrative ellipsis comprises the rest of Daisy's childhood, her adolescence, and her college education. Daisy's impending marriage to Harold Hoad is presented to the reader through newspaper clippings that identify her as "Miss Daisy Goodwill of Bloomington" (79), suggesting a realignment of her origins.

Coral Ann Howells argues that "the border doesn't mean much" (81) to Shields' border-crossing protagonists, but I suggest that the representation of apparently easy transitions from Canada to the United States unravels on further investigation. Shields subtly but consistently exposes the circulation of cultural power within representations of Canada from an American perspective. In *The Stone Diaries*, the narrative voice<sup>1</sup> undercuts the amnesia implied by the Americanized view of Daisy and her father: "You should know that when Cuyler Goodwill speaks . . . about 'living in a progressive country' or 'being a citizen of a proud, free nation,' he is referring to the United States of America and not to the Dominion of Canada, where he was born and where he grew to manhood" (93). This description of Cuyler's new national affiliation elides both the psychological experience of migration and the legal process of becoming an American citizen. Cuyler has adopted a stereotypical, and stereotypically American, view of his nation of origin. The text's earlier, precise descriptions of Canadian locations, such as those emphasizing Winnipeg's development of "[a] series of wide, new boulevards" and "an immense new legislative building in the neo-classical style" (68), give way to "forests and lakes and large airy spaces . . . [lying] now on the other side of the moon" (93) once Cuyler identifies himself as an American citizen.

The narrative voice fluctuates between aligning itself with these generalized images and puncturing them, sometimes through corrections consonant with Cuyler's perspective:

There are educated Bloomingtonians—he meets them every day—who have never heard of the province of Manitoba, or if they have, they're unable to spell it correctly or locate it on a map. They think Ottawa is a town in south-central Illinois, and that Toronto lies somewhere in the northern counties of Ohio. It's as

though a huge eraser has come down from the heavens and wiped out the top of the continent. (93)

The gap between Canadians' and Americans' knowledge about each others' countries has implications for relations of hospitality and hostility, relations that inform the representation of both Canada for its own sake and an American version of Canada. Marshall McLuhan argues that "[t]he majority of Canadians are very grateful for the free use of American news and entertainment on the air and for the princely hospitality and neighbourly dialogue on the ground" (247). But how do we characterize, and where do we locate, this hospitality? The acceptance of US culture might be considered hospitable on the part of Canadian culture; but this hospitality is twinned with hostility, as the economic advantage of American cultural endeavours often overwhelms Canadian cultural production, and American cultural presence in Canada is not reciprocated. Shields' image of an erased country questions national hospitality: can one nation be hospitable to another nation's culture if it does not acknowledge its presence, or indeed, its difference?

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick employs the image of a weather map—minus the top of North America—to illustrate how the US does not define itself in relation to Canada, whereas Canada includes the US in its self-location. Sedgwick compares American newspaper weather maps to their Canadian counterparts, pointing out that "the 'same' experience at the Toronto airport turns out to be completely different" (149) from the American experience. Whereas American "weather maps . . . bounded by the precise, familiar outlines of the forty-eight contiguous United States," appear to "naturaliz[e] the exclusion of Canada" and suggest "that the North American continent drops off into the sea across the top of the United States," in contrast, "every . . . Canadian newspaper [Sedgwick] has seen . . . runs a weather map that extends southward at least as far as the Mason-Dixon line in the United States" (149), acknowledging the geographical and meteorological integrity of the two countries.

The idea of "sameness" turning out to be "different" underpins an examination of the Canada-US border. As Lorraine Code explains, a Canadian can "pass, almost always as a native speaker" (82) in the United States, her Canadianness indistinguishable from Americanness—"as long," Code admits, "as [she doesn't] say 'out' or 'about'" (82). Her difference becomes marked by one vowel sound; sameness turns out to be different. As Code acknowledges, differences between Canada and the US range from "mere variations in cultural *timbre*, inflection, intonation" to evidence of "deep

divisions in the histories that have made each of these two nations what they are, both locally and globally” (82). Erasure of difference implies no *need* for hospitality, that the Canada-US border is “both arbitrary and nondifferentiating” (Staines 2).

The question of what differences are noted, and by whom, configures cultural power and hospitality. Cuyler has adopted the United States as his nation, not just his site of habitation; no longer a guest, he has conformed to the cultural and national identity of the American host. Canada resurfaces intermittently in Cuyler’s narrative. Reintroducing Canada, the narrative voice states that Cuyler “has not spent one minute grieving for his lost country,” then qualifies this assertion:

That country, of course, is not lost at all, though news of the realm only occasionally reaches the Chicago and Indianapolis dailies. The newspaper-reading public of America, so preoccupied with its own vital and combustible ethos, can scarcely be expected to take an interest in the snail-like growth of its polite northerly neighbor, however immense, with its crotchety old king . . . and the relatively low-temperature of its melting pot. Canada is a country where nothing seems ever to happen. A country always dressed in its Sunday go-to-meeting clothes. A country you wouldn’t ask to dance a second waltz. (93)

Indianapolis and Chicago’s “occasional” Canadian news contrasts sharply with McLuhan’s characterization of Canadians’ gratitude for “the free use of American news and entertainment.” If “nothing seems ever to happen” in Canada, is this inactivity mere perception? Canada is feminized by the image of being asked to dance, waiting for another’s invitation, echoing Margaret Atwood’s assessment of Canada’s having “to play the female lead” (389) in its relation with the United States. Further, this description replicates stereotypical associations of Canada with dullness and passivity, combining them with exotic references: “realm” makes the nation sound fantastical, scarcely imaginable—perhaps because it has been erased from the continent?

The novel’s setting shifts back to Canada after Daisy’s brief, disastrous first marriage. Daisy does not intend a permanent return to Canada; rather, she has simply been “thinking of going on a trip” (131). She is tentative about her claim to Canada: “‘I feel as though I’m on my way home,’ she wrote in her travel diary, then stroked the sentiment out, substituting: ‘I feel something might happen to me in Canada’” (132). Anticipating her visit, Barker Flett “can picture Daisy darting about Bloomington, well dressed, nicely shod, prettily gloved, a healthy, hearty American girl” (154). Daisy herself has adopted some generalizations about Canada:

A cool clean place, is how she thinks of it, with a king and queen and Mounties wearing red jackets and people drinking tea and speaking to one another in polite tones, never mind that these images do not accord in any way with her real memories of the hurly-burly of the Winnipeg schoolyard and the dust and horse turds of Simcoe Street. (133)

Daisy's acquired stereotypes position her as an outsider. She plans her "modest, touristy" itinerary with the help of "a pile of train schedules and travel booklets" (132). Daisy occupies the role of guest in her native country, her expectations shaped by promotional brochures: at Niagara Falls, "she [is] not 'seized with rapture' as the travel booklet ha[s] promised" (133).

Despite Daisy's renunciation of her claim to Canada as home, the narrative events lead to her renewed Canadian residence, as the chapter concludes with the rushed wedding of Daisy and Barker. Daisy's status as a tourist, an unmarried (or widowed) woman, an "American," and even her name all change from one chapter to the next: after an eleven-year narrative ellipsis, Daisy is now "Mrs. Flett," at home in her home in Ottawa, no longer positioned as guest. The narrative announces, "People the wide world over like to think of Canada as a land of ice and snow. That's the image they prefer to hang on to, even when they know better. But the fact is, Ottawa in the month of July can be hot as Hades" (157). Daisy might have formerly been included among those who imagine Canada to exist in perpetual winter, "even when they know better." At this point, however, as Mrs. Flett, she has apparently shifted her nation and habitation once again. Having resurfaced in the narrative, Daisy is already realigned with the Canadian host and appears to have easily reassimilated. On the surface, this smooth transition implies an interchangeability of Canadianness and Americanness, yet the novel undermines this notion by demonstrating that the articulation and judgements of sameness and difference between these two nation-states depends upon an imbalance of cultural power and the luxury and blindness of a self-contained identity.

*Larry's Party*, a "bookend" (Nelson 8) or "male sequel" (Schechner 21) to *The Stone Diaries*, also comments on self-contained national identity, but by positing a larger, continental affiliation. Whereas *The Stone Diaries* spans almost the entire twentieth century, *Larry's Party* is set between 1977 and 1997, in a time of sped-up globalizing communication and economics. *The Stone Diaries* does not completely miss out on the developments that constitute the postmodern world order transformation: as Ronald J. Deibert writes, "The 'pre-history' of hypermedia . . . dates back to the middle of the

nineteenth century” and the development of “ways to improve long-distance communications” (115). These innovations include photography, telegraphy, the typewriter, and the telephone (115), all of which are present in *The Stone Diaries*’ narrative, as are the twentieth-century inventions of radio and television. But *The Stone Diaries* does not feature the glut of virtually instant communication found in *Larry’s Party*. For example, whereas *Larry’s Party*’s conclusion is almost entirely composed of messages in a variety of media, including a written note, voicemail, email, and a fax, *The Stone Diaries*’ “Work, 1955-1964” chapter is comprised of letters written to Daisy. Although Daisy dies in the 1990s, the earlier novel is less concerned with the global implications of later twentieth-century technologies. Further, the two decades of *Larry’s Party*’s setting are particularly characterized by postmodern world order transformation and the perception of globalization weakening the nation-state. Many key aspects of global financial and communication networks were developed or enhanced during this period, such as “the burgeoning home computer market beginning in the late 1970s” (Deibert 122), the “more widespread” presence of transnational banking in the 1960s and 1970s (149), and the deregulation under Reagan and Thatcher that “swept through all sectors of the advanced economies, whipping into a frenzy the speculative flows of capital across borders” (150).

In this context, *Larry’s Party* initially appears to eschew the nation in favour of larger affiliations, namely the continent. Shields frequently invokes North America in the chapters set in Canada. Winnipeg, for example, appears to be equally North American and Canadian: it is “[t]he windiest city in the country, in North America” (13); and Larry’s father works “for a custom coach company in south Winnipeg, the largest of its kind in North America” (53). But whereas the Canadian sections’ gesturing towards the continent implies that Canada’s self-perception includes and inserts itself within an idea of North America, and that Canada cannot forget continental relations and their imbalances of power, the near absence of references to North America in the novel’s American sections indicates an exclusive national self-perception, or perhaps a conflation of American and North American. The postmodern world order transformation, in which developments in communications and economics alter “the architecture of *world order*” (Deibert 10), does not affect different nation-states in the same way. Shields’ attribution of North America to the novel’s Canadian sections recalls the distinction between Canadian and US weather maps and its implications for public engagement with the continent.

Despite contextualizing Canadian identity within a continental identity, *Larry's Party* does introduce national difference; but again, its articulations differ depending upon the country from which they are spoken. The Chicago maze commission effects a change in Larry's profession—he “quit[s] his job as manager of a Flowercity outlet” (124) to become a full-time maze designer—and a change in Larry's national location. Invocations of national difference emerge as afterthoughts. When Larry's mother identifies Chicago as “a long, long way from home, and it's another country even” (125), distance supersedes national difference, but nation adds to the perception of distance: though Chicago is “a thousand miles away [from] Winnipeg” (188), Larry might have moved such a distance within Canada. Similarly, when Larry characterizes himself as having “lived in two cities, Winnipeg and Chicago. Make that two countries” (169), national difference occurs to him belatedly.

But the nation as afterthought and the implied North American inclusiveness pertain only to Canadian perspectives. In contrast, descriptions of Larry in Chicago, which suggest an American perspective, foreground assessments of national difference, further troubling what initially appears as “a ‘North American’ identity as [Larry] moves easily across the Canada/United States border” (Howells 92). These assessments reveal an imbalance of power, identifying those who can afford ignorance:

His voice . . . radiates an impression of calm, seasoned good will. Low tones predominate and respectful pauses, and these are generally, and generously, attributed to Larry's Canadian Background, since it's well known among his and Beth's good friends that he was born and brought up in the Canadian city of Winnipeg. Just where this city is located is less well known: somewhere up there, somewhere northerly, a representative piece of that polite, white, silent kingdom with its aging, jowly Queen and snowy mountain ranges and people sugaring off and drinking tea and casting for trout and nodding amicably—much as Larry nods at his neighbor across a backyard patio in Oak Park and sips his glass of California Chablis, and casts his glance fixedly up at the arch of maple boughs when asked for his views about the intentions of George Bush or about the exorbitant cost of National Public Radio. As for the politics of a universal health care plan, Larry is noticeably silent. (206)

Using strategies similar to those in *The Stone Diaries*, this passage invokes the different political histories of Canada and the United States, emphasizing Canada's place within the Commonwealth through reference to the queen and presenting this position as an exotic but outdated affiliation, as the fairytale connotation of “kingdom” suggests. Further, “snowy mountain

ranges” provide generalizations about Canada through expansive natural features while the vagueness about Canadian locations—“somewhere *up there*”—betrays an ignorance about Canadian geography. Associating Larry’s silence on political matters with maple boughs might allude to his Canadian origins, but perhaps this link questions the simplistic perception of Larry’s American friends, who mark him as different.

Larry’s sense of affiliation with the United States develops gradually. Shortly after his cross-border move, “Winnipeg [is] still his here and now . . . even though he now [stands] in a living room in suburban Chicago” (154). Such references as “Larry was back in Winnipeg just a month ago” (159) emphasize Larry’s emigration from Canada, implying a return to a point of origin, both geographical and temporal. Later, Larry is described as “formerly of Winnipeg, Canada” (210), the larger context of Canada, rather than Manitoba, invoking an American perspective. Further, the statement of Larry’s having “a twelve-year-old son up in Canada” (164) both erases Larry’s emigration, positioning him as an American, and indicates only the vast country north of the United States.

In a 1981 address to the Harvard Consortium in Inter-American Relations, Margaret Atwood used the US-Mexico relationship as a comparative illustration of Canadian-American relations: “Americans and Canadians are not the same; they are the products of two very different histories, two very different situations. Put simply, south of you you have Mexico and south of us we have you” (392). Atwood invokes the continent to demonstrate the differences between its component countries. *Larry’s Party’s* Canadian chapters, in contrast, imagine North America through what Canada and the United States have in common. This focus on sameness occurs at the expense of differences within North America: not just between Canada and the United States, but also between Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Just as the image of North America without Canada suggests the top of the continent has gone missing, so the invocation of North America without Mexico suggests the bottom of the continent has either vanished or was never included. Indeed, Canadians have “appeared to deny Mexico its place in North America, so absorbed have they been with their own development and the power and influence of their immediate neighbour” (Ogelsby 1).

*Larry’s Party* gestures towards the gaps in its conception of North America by invoking trade agreements that affect the continent as a whole. As Deibert writes, “Nearly all states now find themselves enmeshed in an ever-widening network of . . . international institutions, regimes, organizations,

and regional trading blocs that have arisen in reaction to the trans-nationalization of production and finance" (157). *Larry's Party* takes place during negotiations of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement (1989), NAFTA (1994), and the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas. That these agreements do not equally benefit the nation-states involved, namely that they "appea[r] to have increased the power asymmetry between the hegemon . . . and its neighbours" (Clarkson 42), compromises the notion of hospitality and partnership through trade.

*Larry's Party* repeatedly invokes shifting economics and locates Larry within a global economic framework. Larry has been working "at Flowerfolks for twelve years" when "[a]ll twelve Flowerfolks stores [are] swallowed up by Flowercity, the California-based multinational" (61). This takeover occurs in 1981, eight years before the ratification of the FTA, but the American origin of the multinational, coupled with the apparent powerlessness of the chain being "swallowed up," suggests Canadian fears of US economic invasion. Flowercity is not the chain's last incarnation: five years later, it is "taken over by Flower Village, a Japanese conglomerate" (126). This shift from California multinational to Japanese conglomerate not only increases the scale of international economics but also invokes the discourse of globalization through the name "Flower Village," gesturing towards McLuhan's global village. The "city" of Flowercity ostensibly becomes more intimate, as "village" implies, yet the global economics that have effected the change in name compromise this suggestion.

Larry's florist work highlights the relation between production and consumption, foregrounding a global circulation of goods through "[t]he gingers [that] get shipped to Manitoba from South Africa, freesia from Holland, and carnations from California" (74). The tracing of these flowers back to their origins demonstrates a globalized network of trade within which Larry locates himself and his access to the rest of the world: he is "plugged into the planet. He's part of the action, part of the world's work, a cog in the great turning wheel of desire and intention" (77). As the description of the alstroemeria's growth suggests, this global consciousness is largely articulated through awareness of Canada's hemispheric location, itself owing significantly to the development of NAFTA and discussions of the FTAA, which provides a gateway for Larry's globalized outlook:

This flower, an herb really, started out as a seed way down in South America in Colombia. Some Spanish-speaking guy, as Larry imagines him, harvested the seeds of this flower and someone else put it back into the earth, carefully, using



his hands probably, to push the soil in place. They earned their daily bread doing that, fed their families, kept themselves alert. It's South American rain that drenches the Colombian earth and foreign sunshine that falls on the first green shoots, and it all happens, it all works. (76)

This passage uses Shields' technique of locating Canada in vague, generalized terms to indicate US ignorance. Here, however, a Canadian struggles with details about Colombia: whereas Canada is "up there" in relation to the United States, South America, for Larry, is "way down" from Canada.

Larry expands the alstroemeria narrative, supplementing his initial, romanticized image of a Spanish-speaking man and acknowledging his own ignorance. As such, Larry bears out Carlos Fuentes' claim that "[e]very North American, before this century is over, will find that he or she has a personal frontier with Latin America" (8). Although this frontier "can be starved by suspicion, ghost stories, arrogance, ignorance, scorn and violence" (8), Larry attempts to imagine beyond his ignorance about Colombia and reflects on his relationship to the "Spanish-speaking laborers equipped with hoes arriv[ing] to beat back the weeds, but are they men or women who do this work? Maybe both, and maybe children, too, in that part of the world" (76). Larry recognizes the disjunction between the locations of production and consumption, wondering whether the Colombian labourers,

when they perform this tedious and backbreaking work . . . have any idea . . . that [the flowers] will be transported across international frontiers, sorted, sold, inspected, sold again, and that . . . they will come to rest in the hands of a young Canadian male in an ordinary mid-continental florist establishment, bringing with them a spot of organic color in a white and frozen country. (76)

Despite its vague assumptions, Larry's alstroemeria narrative both strives toward some specificity and the implications of global capitalism and tears open the false seamlessness of capitalist production and consumption; that Larry wonders at all about production breaks the illusion of no labour. Further, it demonstrates Canada's relationship not only with the United States, but also with South American countries, more easily marked as "different" from Canada in climate, language, and economic privilege. As the global economy largely regards the South as a "low-wage, low-skilled labor market" (Deibert 147), "global interconnectedness" does not counteract "the persistence of North-South divisions" and "the asymmetry of power relations" (Slater 194). Thus, Shields depicts the first-world location of Canada as another point against which the third world "grates and bleeds," if not at a physical border, then within Larry's consciousness.

If “North America” signifies differently in Canada than in the US, the novel also problematizes dominant Canadian conceptions of this continent that includes Mexico. The alstroemeria narrative posits an opposition between North and South America, based on Larry’s imagining linguistic and economic differences that displace “Spanish-speaking labourers” out of North America. Larry’s consideration of the alstroemeria, coupled with the novel’s concern with global economics, punctures the exclusive view of North America while including Canada within a larger context of the Americas. As such, the novel both invokes exclusive constructions of North America and subtly argues in favour of “making” the continent three countries, not two.

Despite its representation of an increasingly globalizing economy, and the implications for the nation-state’s authority that accompany this economy, *Larry’s Party* both explores the networks of a globalizing planet and reasserts the nation-state’s presence. On the one hand, *Larry’s Party* resonates with many of Frank Davey’s contentions in *Post-National Arguments*, sharing with the novels studied the “various discourses of intimacy, home, and neighbourhood, together with others of global distance and multinational community” (258). The reintroductions of Larry at the beginning of each chapter increase the focus on his local communities, particularly Winnipeg. Gradual addition of detail fills in the particulars of his house, friends, family, and neighbourhood even as his florist work exposes him to globalization. Further, the “voyages, air flights, and international hotels” (259) that Davey notes in recent “post-national” Anglophone-Canadian literature surface in Larry’s mobility, afforded him by the Guggenheim fellowship (through which he travels to Ireland, Britain, continental Europe, Japan, and Australia) and his transatlantic marriage to Beth.

Whereas Davey finds the “post-national” novels lacking in “constructions of region, province, and nation” and “any social geography that can be called ‘Canada’” (259), *Larry’s Party* reinserts the nation between the local and the global. Larry’s work both depends upon local specificity—the McCord maze in Toronto, for instance, requires “five-leaf aralia (tolerates polluted air well)” and “ninebark, which bears up against wind and cold” (289)—and can transcend the local in terms of his administrative base: “He could do his maze design work and consulting from any major city in North America. Electronic outreach, instant communication; this was the nineties” (259). But if Larry can live anywhere in North America, “he finally chooses to settle in Toronto and be a Canadian” (Colville 90). Granted, this move

accommodates the McCord commission, repeating his earlier professionally driven relocation to Chicago; further, he seeks out “the warmth of blood connection” (259) provided by his sister Midge’s prior move to Toronto. But Larry’s move is also articulated in national terms: “‘That’s up there in Canada, isn’t it?’ said Larry Liddle. ‘Yes,’ Larry Weller said, and then added apologetically, ‘That’s where I come from originally’” (255). The text never indicates whether Larry has ever been to Toronto, but Toronto nevertheless invokes his “origins”; the national frame of reference persists. Although Davey observes that in “[t]he Prairie pattern of meaning . . . Toronto signifies exploitive business practices” (21), *Larry’s Party* does not present Toronto as contentious for its Winnipeg-born and bred protagonist. National identification and articulations of national character override regional rivalry: “This is Canada, that cold crested country with its changeable weather and staunch heart” (290).

Considerations of hospitality following Larry’s move to Toronto further consolidate the reinscription of the nation. Larry’s renewed host status in Canada, his “at-home-ness,” carries practical implications, as illustrated by his hospital stay during his coma. The text implicitly reintroduces the nationally circumscribed medicare debate—to which Larry does not contribute in Chicago—by making Larry the recipient of medicare delivered in Toronto, administered in Ontario, part of a policy, entrenched in the Canada Health Act, that distinguishes the Canadian from the American nation-state. Although Shields provides minute details of Larry’s hospital stay—“Hundreds of hands had touched him during the twenty-two-day period of his unconsciousness” (283)—she tellingly stays silent about the cost of this “meticulous care and almost constant surveillance” (282); “the TV that Midge had rented” (272) constitutes the only aspect of Larry’s hospitalization with a cost attached to it at the point of delivery. In contrast, we are told in *The Stone Diaries* during Daisy’s hospitalization in Florida, for an emergency double bypass and a cancerous kidney removal, that “Blue Cross covers almost everything” (316).

*Hospitality* shares etymological links with *hospital*, and Larry’s host status upon his move to Toronto effects his reinitiation into Canada’s universal medicare. Larry’s recovery also intertwines national identification and healing through the televised coverage of the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, which he watches from his hospital bed. The Olympics coverage provides another way in which Larry is “plugged into the planet,” and indeed, “[t]he fluidity and increasing porousness of borders” (Deibert 217) operates in

conjunction with communications developments. But despite the argument that television, “[u]nlike a newspaper or a book, . . . was never a respecter of borders. It always belonged to another paradigm, one that was and is intrinsically destabilizing to the nation-state” (Williams, *Imaged Nations* 62), the role the Olympics coverage plays in Larry’s recovery both rests on and reinforces his interpellation as Canadian. Although Larry has woken from his coma and is “seduced . . . back to life” (273) by his hospital meals, kept informed by the “the TV screen” and “[t]he newspapers . . . overflowing with thrilling surprises” (273), he does not fully rejoin the world until “the Olympic Games, finally, beamed from Atlanta, Georgia . . . sav[e] him” (273). A “carnival of muscle and precision” brings Larry “back to his own body,” but more precisely it is “[w]atching Donovan Bailey run the hundred meter dash and take the gold medal” (274) that effects Larry’s recovery, as indicated by his celebration with Bill Herschel:

[T]hey filled the room with little yips of joy. Bill whipped off his T-shirt, waving it like a flag over his head, and performed a mad hopping dance at the foot of the bed, two hundred pounds of gesticulating male flesh, and Larry, still connected to his tubes and wires, felt the bright juice of euphoria surge through his deadened tissues. Breath, beginnings. He was on the mend. . . . The moment overflowed with itself, its massed perfection. The air in front of his eyes became tender. He was alive again in the housing of his skin and blood, and for the moment that was enough. (274)

Whereas Larry’s hospitalization emphasizes the state’s role, implicitly arguing both that “[s]tates still perform essential functions” (Deibert 213) and that health care delivery remains an essential function despite “the attack by market-identified forces on the social protective power of the nation-state” (Angus 20), Bailey’s victory arouses Larry’s national affiliation, appealing to and reinforcing his emotional attachment to the nation. Shields never mentions Bailey’s Canadianness, but she does not need to for Canadian readers, who surely supply the national implications of Larry and Bill’s celebration and read national significance into the simile of the flag.

Larry’s community, as constituted by the guests of his party at the end of the novel, comprises several different nationalities (Canadian, American, Spanish), many of the guests having relocated or intending to relocate across provincial and national borders, according to their professions and roles within the global economy’s demands. Yet Larry plays host when he *is* the host in national terms, when his residence matches his nation of origin. Despite his access to goods that circumnavigate the globe, the champagne

Larry serves, as the Spanish Samuel Alvero notes, “is made in Canada” (309), its precise location overwritten with the national distinction. Canada functions somewhat as the “home-base of the protagonist” (Davey 259), but significantly, if nation occurs to Larry as an afterthought, Canada is nevertheless a base he actively chooses to rejoin.

A dual American and Canadian citizen, Shields described herself as having “a foot on either side of the border” (qtd. in Gussow C18). Contrary to Henighan’s suggestion, however, her texts neither present a straightforward interchangeability of Canada and the United States nor argue for Canada’s assimilation. *The Stone Diaries* and *Larry’s Party* demonstrate that to be a Canadian citizen is to be keenly, and constantly, aware of US norms. As Atwood suggests, “Americans don’t usually *have* to think about Canadian-American relations. . . . Why think about something which you believe affects you so little? We, on the other hand, have to think about you, whether we like it or not” (379). This imbalance, as Shields’ novels indicate, is founded upon discrepancies in cultural, political, and economic power that infuse everyday observations and interactions with a fraught, cross-border hospitality. In demonstrating the changing architecture of world order largely through their North American focus, these novels expose the continent’s power imbalances. Despite the development of global modes of communication, *Larry’s Party* demonstrates that little has changed at the end of the twentieth century from earlier representations of US knowledge of Canada as shown in *The Stone Diaries*. While *The Stone Diaries* and *Larry’s Party* may illustrate the fragility of the Canada-US border, “the border that allows our existence in North America” (Angus 127), they do not endorse its erasure. Rather, they navigate through Canada’s continental and global contexts, acknowledging how these come to bear on the nation-state in its own relationships to power in economics, politics, and culture.

## NOTES

- 1 Many critics have examined *The Stone Diaries*’ use of voice, particularly the slippages between first- and third-person narration. Among their conclusions are that “the anonymous ‘I’-narrator” (Mellor 99) is distinct from Daisy and that the “‘I’ who writes of ‘her’ is dramatically split into two persons as a seemingly new narrator intervenes between the first and us to speak in an impersonal third person” (Williams, “Re-imagining” 132). I use the term “narrative voice,” recognizing that this voice is sometimes consonant with Daisy’s perspective, sometimes consonant with other characters’; at other points, the voice adopts an omniscient perspective.

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## Beta love

tweaks a brilliant tracking problem  
with some scotch tape and brandy

consumed with talcum lips,  
charmed in prickling cactus tears,

cures hunger with rich salad  
strawberries and my special vinaigrette

drowns a sentimental rain forest  
does stroke and your face glides

in regrettable forecasts; from the ghost  
of the sun to the lotion the wind wears

panic lovingly then insane  
over the price of soap

or

knot up anxious at the fear of gums  
being massaged by human bristles

scalded by your callousness,  
I am so afraid I run away

to the mountains and feed my body  
to the famine mascot birds until I crawl back

into your cave streaked with cranberry tears  
mouth tooled in wet sand

I should visit  
I can always run away

if you try to chainsaw my limbs off  
but you know I need it.



## **Altérés de loin**

**Mylène Gilbert-Dumas**

*Mystique*. La courte échelle 13,95 \$

**Jean Lemieux**

*On finit toujours par payer*. La courte échelle 22,95 \$

Compte rendu par Jeff Moore

Ah ! de la drogue, des meurtres, les temps instables d'octobre, des étrangers! que faut-il de plus pour passer une agréable soirée de lecture remplie d'adrénaline? Suivre la quête des deux détectives déterminés, dans chacun de ces romans, à dévoiler les désillusions trompeuses est un plaisir ; tout comme l'habileté dont font preuve les deux jeunes auteurs, Gilbert-Dumas (enseignante) et Lemieux (médecin), à laisser couler leurs récits. Ceci est suffisant pour qu'en découlent deux véritables « thrillers ». On permet l'entrée de quelques « gens de l'extérieur ». On les laisse fraterniser avec les quelques personnages marginaux de la population locale. Dans le cas de Lemieux, on ajoute du sel de mer et des courants d'air des Iles-de-la-Madeleine, dans le cas de Gilbert-Dumas, on s'évapore dans les ténèbres brumeuses du développement des adolescents à Québec, et puis voilà ! le tout donne un ragoût suffisamment bouilli pour réchauffer le ventre, le coeur et l'esprit du lecteur.

Dans *Mystique*, Ariane Blackburn témoigne du meurtre fantastique d'un adolescent, tué d'un coup d'épée, lors d'une promenade sur le campus de l'Université Laval par une nuit brumeuse. Choquée par

l'événement, Ariane devient alors monitrice de langues dans une école secondaire. Elle tentera ainsi de s'immiscer dans le mystérieux monde des adolescents ; plusieurs sont morts récemment soit par overdose de « mystique », lors de séances de Donjons et dragons ou de répétitions d'escrime données par le prof d'éducation physique—dealer notoire—et le travailleur social norvégien de l'école, Erik Eriksson. Celui-ci est en réalité un spectre âgé de 2000 ans, condamné à errer sur la terre où il entraîne de son mieux des combattants dont un seul pourra le battre et brisera ainsi le sortilège druidique qui le possède. Ariane, narratrice du récit, s'adresse au lecteur de trois façons : 1) elle lui parle directement, surtout en fin de chapitre, soit sous forme de résumé ou de récit à suspense ; 2) par le biais de ses conversations avec sa confidente Sarah, ou lors de rendez-vous hebdomadaires de démystification au Café Moyen-Age sur la Grande Allée où le lecteur joue un rôle de voyeur ; 3) elle s'insère dans le récit, s'adressant alors au lecteur à la troisième personne. Dans ce roman qui mélange des genres tels la fantaisie urbaine de Charles de Lint, le roman policier, le suspense, le drame et le crime, la mythologie nordique vieille s'entrechoque à la modernité occidentale contemporaine.

Dans le saga de Lemieux, André Surprenant est à la poursuite de deux buts : la résolution de l'assassinat d'une adolescente et un semblant d'équilibre entre sa vie professionnelle et personnelle. L'auteur nous fait bien sentir que l'isolement géographique

des Îles passe par ses particularités linguistiques. Il sait aussi garder une étroite relation entre l'intrigue qui avance très rapidement et une description détaillée de plusieurs personnages et lieux colorés. Afin de résoudre le meurtre, Surprenant doit surmonter différents obstacles tels que le *statu quo* institutionnel personnifié par l'intimidant Denis Gingras responsable de l'enquête provinciale, ses relations tordues avec son ami Bernard et avec la nouvelle copine de celui-ci, Elise de Toronto. Que ce soit par le biais des suspects habituels, des dealers ruraux, des analyses d'ADN, de la fugue de sa femme, des avances ambiguës de son assistant ou de l'enquête compétitive de Gingras, Surprenant guide le lecteur vers la quête de plusieurs vérités. Vérités qui pour lui se résument à trouver ce qui résonne en lui et qui le mèneront jusqu'à l'apogée de sa dérive ciblée où il est kidnappé et emprisonné sur un bateau par Elise, elle-même coupable d'avoir tué l'adolescente à cause d'un crime d'amour. À la fin, à la manière de *Miami Vice*, Bernard, enfin sorti de sa confusion, surgit du fond du bateau pour porter secours à son meilleur ami pendant qu'Élise se jette à la mer, finissant elle-même à la dérive.

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## Generalizations

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### Wayne H. Brekhuis

*Peacocks, Chameleons, Centaurs: Gay Suburbia and the Grammar of Social Identity.* U of Chicago P \$20.00

### Christopher N. Kendall

*Gay Male Pornography: An Issue of Sex Discrimination.* UBC Press \$29.95

Reviewed by Stephen Guy-Bray

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Wayne H. Brekhuis' discussion of homosexuality in the suburbs fills a gap in queer sociology, as most studies of gay men see homosexuality as an urban phenomenon: while many gay people may have the misfortune to have been born in the suburbs or

the country, the assumption has always been that they will all eventually move to the big city. The men Brekhuis discusses are men who have chosen the suburban life (his focus is on men in New Jersey). In many ways, these men are not that different from their neighbours: they work in the suburbs, drive SUVs, and are fairly conservative (some going so far as to vote Republican). In fact, if it weren't for all that sodomy, there'd be no telling most of them from straight suburbanites.

The reason for the rather odd title is that Brekhuis divides gay men into three groups. Confusingly, he has three terms for each of these groups: peacocks, chameleons, centaurs; lifestylers, integrators, commuters; nouns, verbs, adjectives (I think the last of these taxonomies would have worked better if he had changed "verbs" to "gerunds" and "adjectives" to "adverbs"). Brekhuis feels that these terms can be used of other groups as well and often neglects his gay suburbanites in order to demonstrate this. The low point of this aspect of the book comes when he refers to "homeless lifestylers." As opposed, one imagines, to those for whom being homeless is merely a weekend diversion.

In other words, Brekhuis has succumbed to a common sociological temptation: not content with doing the empirical research, he felt the need to come up with terminology and a full-fledged theory—or, rather, "theory." This is a pity as the comments made by the men he interviewed are almost always interesting and his own comments about them and about his work are engaging. The strongest chapter is the final one, in which Brekhuis talks about himself and his relation to his work. He bravely confesses that he is not only heterosexual, but also a metalhead and a wildlife watcher and demonstrates his awareness that people are difficult to categorize. I wish he had begun with this chapter and dispensed with his theoretical framework altogether, especially since I can think of no gay men I know

personally who really fit into any of his categories. This book is often entertaining and I can imagine that it will be useful, but I was depressed by the homophobia of many of Brekhus' "native informants." Many of these are gay men who clearly feel that being gay is somehow less than being straight, and that by being closeted around neighbours and colleagues they are better than people who are openly gay—but not, it seems (or at least not in their own minds), better than their openly straight neighbours and colleagues.

Christopher N. Kendall's book is an attack on pornography, which he sees as responsible for, among other things, rape and sexism, but also for gay men's low self image. His particular focus is on recent debates on pornography and the law in Canada. As should already be clear to those who followed these debates, he sides with Catherine MacKinnon. As Kendall is a lawyer, I was surprised with how poorly argued his book is and with its often logic-free atmosphere. For instance, Kendall feels that one of the reasons to ban pornography is that it contributes to the oppression of women. Even if we were to grant this claim, it would still be the case that many other things contribute far more to the oppression of women: popular culture (more or less in its entirety) and religion are two particularly good examples. Yet Kendall and MacKinnon and their supporters do not seek to ban these things, despite the fact that while only a relatively small number of people consume pornography, everyone in the entire world consumes popular culture and is affected by religion to some extent. Anti-pornography activists choose to pursue pornography because they hope to profit from the prudishness, sexism, and homophobia of censorship activists. This alliance may well be strategically prudent, but it is neither logical nor ultimately helpful to the women (and gay men) they ostensibly seek to help.

A further problem with Kendall's argumentation is his tendency to generalize. There are far too many statements in the book of the following kind: "pornography is *x*" and "gay men think *y*." Anyone with even moderate knowledge of either pornography or gay men will instantly recognize the falsity of most of these generalizations. Perhaps the best example comes when he says that "gay men in bars cease to be human." While I am naturally sorry that Kendall's experiences in gay bars have been unpleasant—for what else could have prompted this obviously untrue statement?—his own experience should be neither the basis for a general theory of all gay men nor support for an argument.

Although Kendall dutifully describes a good deal of porn in the course of his book and attempts to use these descriptions as evidence, he is not much better with images than he is with actual people. For instance, in a description of a photo of three men sitting on a sofa, each of whom is being fucked, Kendall asks "what it does to a person to kneel to perform sex for a camera." While performing sex for a camera is outside of my field of expertise, I feel I should point out that kneeling to perform fellatio is not inherently demeaning or even odd, but rather eminently practical. Empirically-minded readers can verify this assertion at home.

For me, one of the most surprising passages in the book occurs in Kendall's discussion of the Glad Day case in Toronto. He says that

Kyle Raye . . . was asked if the presentation of violent behaviour in gay male pornography might encourage some men to replicate this behaviour. Raye testified that he had never received complaints. . . . Given that Toronto has the largest lesbian and gay male population in Canada and that, in the United States, gay male domestic abuse is the third largest health problem facing gay men, Raye's opinion is questionable.

For one thing, the man in question is actually called Kyle Rae. What really struck me was that Rae did not offer an opinion: he stated a fact. What is more, he stated that fact under oath. Kendall may wish to accuse him of perjury, but he cannot characterize the statement as an opinion. I naively thought a lawyer would have to know the difference between a fact and an opinion. But then—and this is even more naive—I thought gay men were too smart to buy sport utility vehicles. These are my own generalizations, and I'm grateful to Kendall and Brekhus for correcting them.

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## Cross-cultural Exchanges

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### Monique Patenaude

*Made in Auroville, India.* Triptyque \$18.00

### Keith Garebian

*Frida: Paint me as a Volcano / Frida: Un Volcan de Souffrance.* Buschek \$15.00

### Shodja Eddin Ziaïan

*Contes iraniens islamisés.* Gref \$18.00

Reviewed by Roseanna Dufault

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The three works considered here take us from Quebec to India, from India to Mexico, and from Iran back to Canada. In a world where mutual understanding is badly needed, these disparate texts offer welcome glimpses into other cultures.

The title *Made in Auroville, India* refers to clothing and crafts fashioned by residents of the galaxy-shaped city founded in 1968 by Mira Alfassa, known as “Mère.” Organized according to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo, Auroville attracted young people from all over the world, including Lysiane Delambre, narrator of Monique Patenaude’s autobiographical first novel. Disillusioned by events of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Lysiane leaves Quebec to pursue spiritual truth and meaning in India. The narrative follows her twenty-year spiritual journey, which includes a serious illness, acute depression, a search for useful contributions to the community,

as well as encounters with various other residents of Auroville. The text contains pithy observations regarding Quebec, whose “vieux rêve d’indépendance . . . apparaissait de plus en plus anachronique dans l’ambiance actuelle de mondialisation” (194), as well as comments on paradoxes in India’s complex society. Much of the text reflects on whether Auroville more closely resembles an ashram or a Club Med. The fact that “Mère” intended it to belong to humanity in general rather than to anyone in particular poses legal problems and numerous conflicts among groups and individuals who seek to claim ownership. Attempting to live freely, without laws or hierarchy, proves to be a serious challenge for Auroville’s most sincere devotees. Patenaude’s novel manages to convey the appeal of utopian visions and the attraction of India’s mysticism, while insightfully exposing human obstacles to harmony and enlightenment.

Originally from Bombay, Keith Garebian incorporates powerful images in his book of poetry based on the life and works of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. *Frida: Paint me as a Volcano / Frida: Un Volcan de Souffrance* is a bilingual edition with English and French translations on facing pages. A short glossary of Spanish terms is included, along with a list of biographical works consulted. Garebian’s words realize the vivid colours and intense emotions of Kahlo’s surreal paintings, which evoke the flora and fauna, folklore and traditions of Mexico. Poetic allusions to actual self portraits interspersed with brief prose passages express Kahlo’s physical pain, her love and admiration for Diego Rivera, and the suffering caused by his affairs. Arlette Francière’s French versions beautifully and idiomatically capture the essence of the original English. An excerpt chosen at random demonstrates this work’s compelling charm: “Outside the avocado doors / broad leaves are wet from dreaming / fierce origins, my necklace / dangling hearts and hands” (106). “Devant

les portes vert olive / de larges feuilles sortent mouillées / de rêves d'origines féroces, mon collier / faisant danser des coeurs et des mains" (107).

*Contes iraniens islamisés* offers updated French translations of ancient Persian texts enhanced by Shodja Eddin Ziaïan's extensive notes and commentary. Ziaïan avoids sexist language by inventing the term "fommes" to indicate humans (*femmes* plus *hommes*, equal parts composing "la humanité"). Thus, the tales, many of which inspired French authors La Fontaine and Voltaire, involve "animaux-fommes," animal protagonists who talk and sometimes interact with humans, and "fommes-animaux," human protagonists with animal-like natures. In an example of the former, "Une pommade pour les brûlures," a clan of monkeys lives near a village whose humans use fireworks irresponsibly. Ignoring warnings to leave, the monkeys face disastrous consequences when their flesh is sought as a burn remedy after the inevitable fire. In an example of the latter, "Une souris qui mange du fer," a dishonest neighbor steals a quantity of iron entrusted to him and blames the loss on a hungry mouse. In retaliation, the owner kidnaps his neighbour's son and holds him hostage until the iron is returned. By far, the most interesting part of this collection is the "Postface," which contains Ziaïan's critical comments on the texts. Since the stories have long been considered useful for instilling moral values in children, Ziaïan questions whether their messages are in fact moral. Not really, he concludes, since they demonstrate survival strategies that frequently involve ruse and hypocrisy. Citing his own experiences of intimidation and censorship following the 1979 revolution in his native Iran, Ziaïan hopes to gain the sympathy of his readers and convey appreciation for Iran's open and tolerant cultural traditions, which have unfortunately been confused with and dominated by a monolithic form of Islam.

## Seeing What He Saw

David Stouck

*As For Sinclair Ross*. U of Toronto P \$45.00

Reviewed by Robert Thacker

In 1969, writing to see if McClelland & Stewart would be interested in considering his latest novel, *Whir of Gold*, for publication, Sinclair Ross asked his editor there to be blunt in her assessment of the manuscript: "I am well on in years and used to obscurity—even comfortable in it—and a firm NO will not be a surprise or a big disappointment." And toward the end of Ross' life in 1996, Mavis Gallant, his longtime friend from their days in Montreal, "reflected ruefully and a little contemptuously: 'Poor Jimmy, he always lacked the courage to put himself forward and press on with his career. He yielded to the slightest criticism.'" Together, these two quotations encapsulate David Stouck's subject, Sinclair Ross, who certainly wrote throughout his long life from a deep obscurity, one he was quite comfortable in, an obscurity maintained by his inability to "put himself forward," just as Gallant told Stouck. When Robert Kroetsch published an obituary of Ross in the *Globe and Mail*, he wrote that Ross "embraced a kind of invisibility."

Yet however obscured as a person, Ross was the writer who produced *As For Me and My House*—easily among the very best novels ever written by a Canadian and certainly one of two unequalled evocations of prairie landscape. (Only Willa Cather's *My Ántonia* achieves equivalent effects.) As he closes this fine, careful, and judicious biography, Stouck asserts that Ross wrote on through his long life of obscurity not to express himself but, "like Chekhov," because "he wanted us to see some of the things he saw. The stark and unforgiving beauty of the prairie was one of those things, captured with all the aching loveliness of something experienced alone."

As *For Sinclair Ross* follows close after Stouck's *Ethel Wilson: A Critical Biography* (2003) and, by it, he now establishes himself as among this country's leading literary biographers. His book on Wilson is based of necessity on archival sources and interviews with people who knew her. Here, by contrast, Stouck brings to bear a personal knowledge of Ross—the two began a correspondence in the 1970s when Ross was living in Europe and, after the writer moved to Vancouver in 1982, Stouck came to know him personally, eventually gaining his trust and cooperation for this biography. Thus Ross is seen here as a collaborator—one of two, since Stouck began this project along with another scholar, John O'Connor, who worked with him during the research phase. Acknowledging his subject's collaboration in his preface, Stouck offers a thumbnail sketch of the whole: "Sinclair Ross told me about his lonely childhood and about his cheerful but overbearing mother, and about the men and women with whom he fell in love. He told me about his work and about the places where he had travelled. But most of all he told me about his struggles to get published, to make his living as a writer in an inhospitable place and time, and his failure to find an audience." This said, Stouck also acknowledges that there are gaps in the record that even Ross could not fill—childhood years from which nothing could be recalled, not surprisingly, but also periods from Ross' adulthood during the 1950s and 1960s when he just went about his routine working for the Royal Bank of Canada, compulsively "scribbling" evenings, and weekends, pursuing other diversions.

The life story Stouck tells here with grace and precision is not edifying. Ross was born in January 1908 the youngest of three children on a failing Saskatchewan homestead to mismatched parents who would, before he was eight, separate. Never seeing his father again, he grew up living in a succession of homes in which his mother Kate

worked as a housekeeper and cook. Proud of her own family's connections to nobility in her native Scotland, his mother was a domineering presence for much of Ross' life—he lived with her until he joined the army in 1942 and supported her as long as she lived. That support came from Ross' work at the Royal Bank. He began working there after grade eleven and continued, first through a succession of Saskatchewan towns as he and his mother were moved at the bank's behest, and eventually to Winnipeg. After the war, Ross left his mother there to work for the rest of his banking career in Montreal; he retired in 1968 just after his sixtieth birthday and promptly moved to Europe where he remained until returning to Canada in 1980.

At one point, Stouck describes Ross, long after his mother was dead and he was living an expatriate life in Spain, as "still a Prairie boy tethered to his mother." While it is tempting to construct Ross' career as "that of a failed writer held in high public esteem" (another deft description Stouck offers) as owing to his mother, or to his absent father ("a boy without a father is a pitiful thing," he quotes Ross as saying more than once), or to his inability to assert his own case, as Gallant said, Stouck's construction is better seen as "No Other Way." That, of course, is one of Ross' most resonant titles. Ross was his own person and he lived the life he could. Because Stouck enjoyed an extended personal relationship with his subject, though it was complicated in the Vancouver period by Ross' Parkinson's Disease and generally declining health, he is able to bring Ross into his narrative as a person recalling his life, thinking and wondering over it. Thus Ross' boyhood sexual initiation and his adult sexual life—preponderantly gay, although he also had relations with women—are a presence here; his mother is recalled and wondered over, ever present—Ross' last published piece, "Just Wind and Horses" (1988), is a gentle but stark memoir of her;

Ross' friends; but most of all here there is his struggle to break away from the bank to pursue art—first music and then writing—without sufficient success to make either a vocation.

It is in its rendering of Ross the writer that the great accomplishment of *As For Sinclair Ross* lies. Stouck defines the relation between Ross' life and the published (and unpublished) work precisely, carefully, and completely. He does this by drawing on Ross' recollections, certainly, but he corroborates the author's versions of what happened with the available archival record. Thus Ross is seen first gaining notice through his 1930s stories in *Queen's Quarterly*. These were followed by his first novel, *As For Me and My House*, published with comparative ease in New York to critical praise and almost nonexistent sales. Following it, though there were periodical pieces, a second novel was not published until 1958 when *The Well* appeared; *Whirl of Gold* followed in 1970 and *Sawbones Memorial* in 1974.

Owing to the success of *As For Me and My House* and a collection of Ross' stories in the New Canadian Library just as nationalism and Canadian literature took hold in the 1960s and '70s, Ross did indeed become "a failed writer held in high public esteem." Ross' position as the admired author of a Canadian Classic brought him into contact with many of the key players in Canadian literary publishing—Robert Weaver, John Gray, and Jack McClelland, among others—and so his presence was felt, his reputation made. Conceding the sadness of the story, Stouck tells its details sensitively and fully. Like Ross' fiction, his life story offers a stark beauty: no other way. Even so, Ross' personal reclusiveness, his unwillingness to promote his work or himself once *As For Me and My House* had reached classic status, ensured the very invisibility Kroetsch described. But we still see what he saw most emphatically in that book, in *Sawbones Memorial*, and in the stories. Thanks to this

fine biography, we can now also understand much more about just how Ross came to see this stark beauty himself.

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## Memory, Displacement, and Politicized Prejudice

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**Michael Greenstein, ed.**

*Contemporary Jewish Writing in Canada: An Anthology.* U of Nebraska P \$68.70

**Richard Menkis and Norman Ravvin, eds.**

*The Canadian Jewish Studies Reader.* Red Deer P \$24.95

**Derek J. Penslar, Michael R. Marrus and Janice Gross Stein, eds.**

*Contemporary Antisemitism, Canada and the World.* U of Toronto P \$45.00

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Reviewed by Melina Baum Singer

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In *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Canada*, Michael Greenstein brings together a compelling selection of short story, chapter, and essay excerpts by Jewish writers from the early 1960s to the present day. The critical and popular heavy hitters are here: Leonard Cohen, Mordecai Richler, Miriam Waddington, and Anne Michaels. But so are lesser known writers, Naïm Kattan, Chava Rosenfarb, and Judith Kalman, who among many others deserve wider recognition for their work. From the irreverent satire of Richler to the philosophical musings of Michaels, the range of cultural and linguistic affiliations as well as social and political identifications broadens the perception of what constitutes Jewish writing in Canada. Although the book primarily includes work written in English, the Introduction and the accompanying biographical information on each writer emphasize the selections translated from Yiddish and French as well as referencing the varied national and cultural communities from which they draw their imaginings. Yet what connects these writers is not only their attention to memory and displacement and prejudice and assimilation, but

also their responsiveness to the push-pull inherent in the politics of place for diasporic individuals and communities.

The Introduction is a useful place for scholars and students to begin looking for material in the Jewish or ethnic minority canon in Canada. Contextualizing the selections by place—Montreal, Winnipeg, Toronto—Greenstein tracks the historic trajectory of Jewish writing that begins with A.M. Klein. He also refers to many contemporary writers who are not featured in the book but whose work is worth further investigation. As the book is called *Jewish Writing*, a reader would expect to find various genres represented. But other than an essay excerpt from David Solway's "Framing Layton," only fiction is included. The Introduction does not clarify this point, even though it does reference poetry from Klein, Irving Layton, Eli Mandel, and Leonard Cohen and a dramatic work from Jason Sherman, whose inclusion would have added another dimension to the book's emphasis on place as his play *Reading Hebron* examines Jewish identity in light of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The focus on fiction is understandable on one level, as the most well-known Jewish writing in Canada inhabits this genre. Nevertheless, it would seem fair to say that the editor has assembled narratives that ultimately reveal specificities about Jewish experiences and histories, specificities often best shown through fiction. Although the excerpts from Régine Robin and Robert Majzels' fabulous writing pull on the boundaries of the novel and offer something other than narrative realism, only one page of Majzels' *Apikoros Sleuth* is presented. Experimental, language-based, and anti-realist Jewish writing is evidently not the main interest here. Although I recommend this book as a notable introduction, I would have liked to see Adeena Karasick's, Stuart Ross', and Joe Rosenblatt's work among many others included in this

attempt to publicize contemporary Jewish writing. And by extension, I would have liked to see more selections that move beyond sociological perspectives of Jews and Jewish communities in Canada, the central way the book frames the selections.

In *The Canadian Jewish Studies Reader*, Richard Menkis and Norman Ravvin collect papers written since the early 1990s on a range of subjects, including literary, religious, historical, and sociological studies. The book situates the array of work currently produced in the broadly conceived field of Jewish Studies. In the Introduction, Menkis outlines cultural themes and key differences in Canadian Jewish communities. The papers echo this last point through their exploration of internal struggles within Canadian Jewish communities. This focus is productive insofar as it implicitly contests the popular perception that Jews represent a homogenous diasporic collective while also examining the forces that continue to bind Canadian Jews together, forces that mirror some of the concerns of Greenstein's book.

Among the many papers guaranteed to be thought-provoking to a wide range of scholars and students, the following deserve particular attention for bringing new perspectives to Jewish Studies: Menkis' study of "the historical treatment" of Jews in New France as a problematic search to validate Jewish settler roots; Rebecca Margolis' examination of attempts to establish a Yom Kippur Ball as an expression of the intersection of Jewish radicalism, left-wing anarchism, and mass migration from Eastern Europe; Howard Adelman's look at the 1993 conflict in Toronto around the representation of Black characters in *Show Boat* as a way to understand Jewish and Black relations in Canada; and Norman Ravvin's two insightful papers on Matt Cohen's and Eli Mandel's writing and struggles with the Canadian literary establishment are among many papers guaranteed to be thought-provoking to a



wide-range of scholars and students. Many insightful papers intersect with gender studies, an area of minority studies that still demands greater attention.

In *Contemporary Antisemitism, Canada and the World*, editors Derek J. Penslar, Michael R. Marrus, and Janice Gross Stein trace expressions and practices of what constitutes antisemitism today, both in relation and in opposition to the past. The book acknowledges that since the 1960s a vast body of work has been produced on the subject, but it also points out that the work primarily treats antisemitism as historical phenomenon, relegating it to the dustbin of history. From bomb attacks in Istanbul, to physical and verbal assaults in France, to vandalism in Ontario, mounting evidence suggests that the 40-year historic decline in antisemitism is over. This book argues that current manifestations need to be taken seriously and that nuanced and multi-faceted analysis of it must be given room in academic discussions. Ranging from Canadian and International scholars of Jewish Studies in the fields of history, sociology, and political science to Canadian political and non-Jewish judicial and legal leaders, the authors point to 2000 as a significant turning point, a point where antisemitism emerged from marginal subterranean discussions and violently entered into mainstream visibility. This is a timely collection of papers, well worth reading.

Including Derek J. Penslar's thoughtful Introduction, which argues for a renewed understanding of hate-crimes against Jews and Jewish spaces as "politicized prejudice," and Brian Mulroney's surprisingly personal foreword, which among other things looks at Canada's "shameful immigration policies toward Jews," many papers are useful for tracing the history of antisemitism and the various ideologies (political, economic, racial, and religious) folded within it from a Western discourse linked to fears about "ruthless capitalism, revolutionary commu-

nism, [and] avant-garde artistic modernity" to the current globalized discourse. The papers point out that the word antisemitism emerged from Enlightenment categories of race and processes of racialization; in earlier times prejudice toward Jews took form largely from religious ideologies. Among most significant papers are those that debate the relation between antisemitism and antizionism, as all the papers view the Israeli-Palestinian struggle for territory as both the source and justification for recent crimes and suspicion toward Jews globally.

While sharing the belief that civil and legitimate critiques of Israeli policies are not in themselves antisemitic, the papers agree that the line between Israelis and Jews has recently collapsed, thus opening the door to Jews around the world being held responsible for what occurs as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian situation. The papers however differ quite significantly in their perceptions and interpretations of the discursive relations between antisemitism and antizionism and more often than not challenge each other's arguments. Todd M. Endelman argues that many Western European critiques of Israel are embedded with stereotypes about Jews in line with past antisemitism as well as revealing anxiety about Jewish sovereignty; Penslar suggests that the establishment of Israel has fundamentally changed the dynamics of antisemitism as Israelis are not national minority subjects but "empowered actors"; Mark Tessler points out that anti-Israel sentiment in the Middle East does not reveal traditional Western perceptions and biases toward Jews, but rather stems from the belief that "Israel's creation did an injustice to the Palestinians." In turn, Morton Weinfeld's paper draws out the problematics of measuring antisemitism in Canada, where Jews have a high standard of living but increasingly feel insecure and "attacked for their perceived power and suspect loyalties." One oversight the book arguably makes is the

absence of a paper dealing with the current interest in the influence of “Jewish neocons” in America. The question is, as always, whether or not specific comments and discussions reveal prejudice toward Jews or are merely making note of the fact that Jews are involved. A tricky question to say the least. Judith Butler’s recent *Precarious Life: the Powers of Mourning and Violence* and Irshad Manji’s *The Trouble with Islam Today* offer other views on the broad topic.

All three books under review showcase the diversity of writing and criticism, to reveal the range within the category of “Jewish.” I find particularly powerful the urging in *Contemporary Antisemitism* that Jewish scholars need not be the only people to speak about antisemitism today. Alternatively, this insistence necessitates that non-Jews be open to thinking about and addressing what has become a very real concern for Jewish communities around the world.

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## New Regionalisms

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**Alison Calder and Robert Wardhaugh**

*History, Literature, and the Writing of the Canadian Prairies.* U of Manitoba P \$24.95

Reviewed by Janice Fiamengo

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This cross-disciplinary volume of essays responds to the question “When is the prairie?” In their introductory essay, editors Calder and Wardhaugh explain their desire to counter the over-emphasis on space—and the concomitant elision of time and history—in prairie studies of the last 40 years. Geography, they emphasize, is not the sole determining reality of prairie culture; geography and culture, in fact, are mutually constitutive, for people create a place as much as the land shapes a people. Hoping to chart new directions in prairie scholarship, the editors have sought to showcase the dynamic interaction of a range of contexts, including the historical,

economic, political, social, and literary, in creating the region we know as the prairies. The result is an eclectic mix of studies, a few of which deserve to be widely read.

A volume of this kind can offer a snapshot of the “new theoretical frameworks” being developed in the field. Contrary to what the editors say, the majority are not interdisciplinary—if interdisciplinarity involves a language and approach created through the cross-fertilization of two or more disciplines—but most demonstrate a debt to the postmodern, feminist, and post-colonial theories that have so influenced humanities research over the last 20 years. Privileged categories include the marginal, the fragmented, the contingent, the feminine, the non-linear, the fluid, and the racially hybrid. Nothing good can be said for orthodoxy, patriarchy, imperialism, hierarchy, elitism, authority, or liberal individualism. Resistance and transgression are applauded; truth claims, coherence, and even “clock time” are not. Margaret Laurence, who wrote from a white, middle-class, Scotch-Presbyterian background, can be recuperated for her feminist, working-class, and racialized perspectives. Thomas Wharton, Carol Shields, and Gail Anderson-Dargatz are praised for postmodern and anti-hegemonic narrative strategies (though their precise relation to the prairie region is often tenuous). We learn that settler women in Alberta and Saskatchewan negotiated the conventions of gendered behaviour, a young mountaineer who wrote of traversing the Columbia glacier exhibited a liberal ideology, and heritage tourism in two prairie towns fails to represent adequately the experience of minorities. There is nothing new in any of this, though some of it is competently presented.

A number of the essays, though, make a substantial contribution to current scholarship. Reading Sharon Butala’s *The Fourth Archangel*, Frances W. Kaye engagingly explores the meaning of economic, social,

and environmental crisis on the prairies in the context of the region's vast geologic and human history. A thoughtful reflection on the challenges facing prairie communities at the end of the twentieth century, Kaye's essay suggests that historical and technological change might be harnessed to save small-town and rural life. Russell Brown's informative and convincing analysis of Robert Kroetsch's postmodernism argues that *The Words of My Roaring* needs to be read in the context of the apocalyptic Social Credit rhetoric of Bible Bill Aberhart, the evangelical politician whose "roaring" radio broadcasts during the 1930s formed the monomyth Kroetsch both exploited and subverted in the novel. Dennis Cooley, exploring the prairie long poem's "love affair with document," beautifully analyzes how found texts and historical documents are "activated" and brought to life in such poetry. These three essays amply fulfill the editors' criteria, offering models for re-engaging with history in the analysis of prairie writing and making clear the rewards of such an endeavour.

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## There Be Monsters Here

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**Justin D. Edwards**

*Gothic Canada: Reading the Spectre of a National Literature.* U of Alberta P \$34.95

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Reviewed by Marlene Goldman

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Justin D. Edwards' *Gothic Canada: Reading the Spectre of a National Literature*, a dizzying account of all things uncanny and monstrous in Canadian fiction, considers the following questions: "How are the categories of nationhood and the rhetoric of national difference tied to the language of gothicism? What can these discursive ties tell us about a range of other personal and social boundaries—gender, sexuality, class and race—in Canadian literary production? What, then, can the construction and destabilization of these boundaries tell us about

the development of a gothic tradition in Canada?"

Although Edwards invokes the notion of a gothic tradition in Canada, his book does not provide a methodical literary history of Canadian gothic. The various chapters—on space; the sublime; the intersection between realist fiction and gothic conventions; the city; gothicism, transgression, and the law; gothic discourse and the Native other; narratives of trauma; and, finally, on gothic Canadian cinema—offer neither a chronological nor an exhaustive account of the impact of the gothic on Canadian cultural production. Instead, the study, which is gothic in its eclecticism and historical range, is driven by Edwards' particular theoretical interest in the representation of identity, space, and gothicism within the Canadian context, and takes its cue from literary criticism and cultural studies that have challenged the notion of the supposedly coherent, unified subject. In essence, Edwards is indebted to the work of post-structuralist critics such as Judith Butler and Diana Fuss, who came to prominence in the 1980s owing to their insightful critiques of essentialism.

The book's critical framework, of necessity, also extends to discourses of nationalism to explain why Canada as a nation provided a fertile ground for the terrors and excesses associated with the gothic. According to Edwards, several factors contribute to Canada's uncanny and gothic status: for one, it is a settler nation "haunted by the spectral figure of its own fabrication." More problematically, it is also haunted by the ghosts of "the unsettled, the not-yet-colonized, the unsuccessfully colonized, or the decolonized." Ultimately, in contrast to earlier studies of the Canadian gothic, such as Margot Northey's *The Haunted Wilderness* (1976), Edwards' work insists that metaphors of the haunted northern wilderness must recognize that Canada's gothic production is tied to the

postcolonial gothic, to the “imperial dominance and territorial appropriation that has forced the voice of the colonized into the unconscious of the imperial subject and thus haunted the colonizer across generations, time and space.”

Despite the book’s strengths, its fragmented structure and fast-paced approach are problematic; typically, three works are discussed in a single, brief chapter. At times, the book reads like a series of short and only vaguely connected articles. And in its effort to identify all things gothic, the study often opts for reductive readings of the texts under consideration. Also, perhaps because Edwards is working out of country—he teaches at the University of Copenhagen—the book relies on a long-distance view of Canada and adopts the slightly antiquated paradigm of “the nation that lacks an identity.” Finally (and again this might be because Edwards lives in Europe), although he operates within a clearly demarcated post-structuralist theoretical tradition, his book does not enter into dialogue with the full range of contemporary North American scholars who have also written on the sublime, haunting, and the gothic—often on the same texts that he discusses in his chapters. Ultimately, however, these flaws do not overshadow Edwards’ considerable achievement: he has written a much-needed, readable, and engaging account of the gothic in Canadian literature and cinema.

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## Beyond Border Metaphors

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**Heather N. Nicol and Ian Townsend-Gault, eds.**

*Holding the Line: Borders in a Global World.* UBC Press \$29.95

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Reviewed by Elizabeth Maurer

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Border processes need to be considered in tandem with global processes, suggest Heather Nicol and Ian Townsend-Gault in their collection *Holding the Line: Borders in*

*a Global World*. This collection brings central debates about globalization, such as the relevance of the nation-state and the relation between global and local, to an insightful set of studies of the multiple meanings and functions of borders. While the collection is usefully diverse, contributors are united in their starting point—the belief that globalization demands responses. Elements of globalization—terrorism, crime, human rights movements, environmentalism, economic competitiveness—are articulated as challenges which can and must be met through new approaches to border management and border studies.

*Holding the Line* contains chapters by 19 contributors, organized into eight sections—each helpfully prefaced by editorial commentary. Reflections on theoretical and methodological issues begin and end the collection. Borders, these chapters suggest, not only continue to be relevant in the face of globalization, but demand new theoretical frames, technologies, and disciplinary collaborations. The collection is successful in part because it highlights, in both theoretical and practical terms, what is at stake. Steven Jackson’s and Mathew Coleman’s examinations of the socially constructed nature of borders and of globalization, for example, point out the power of unexamined border narratives. Coleman, in his discussion of the “scripts” through which the West understands migration, property, consumption, and scarcity, reminds us that “spatial imaginings” perform political work for some and not others. Steven Jackson, highlighting ways that information technologies are products of “social negotiations,” critiques the often unquestioned notion that information technologies break down boundaries and collapse distances. Such technologies, he suggests, also construct boundaries, operating according to a logic of exclusion. Contributions from Gerald Blake and David Newman offer ways of representing borders designed to take

their social construction into account, so that peace, humanitarian, and environmental efforts can operate more effectively at those borders.

The heart of *Holding the Line* is its four middle sections, which explicitly aim at exploring border processes in a range of international locations. Contributors in these four sections offer case studies that consider local political, economic, and social developments against a backdrop of discourse about the demands of globalization. The juxtaposition of case studies from the European Union, Africa and Asia, South America, the Caribbean, and North America is highly productive. It unsettles, for instance, dominant narratives about globalization's effects on social space and economics, post-coloniality's implications for border politics, and the possibilities for cooperation between commercial and environmental interests. It also forms a concrete background against which to read theoretical pieces that follow, such as those drawing on Henri Lefebvre's theories of space as socially constructed out of lived experience and representation.

These four sections also provide what may be the book's most useful and surprising feature: an exploration of *regionalism*, especially transborder and transnational regionalism, as a response to globalization. Two articles detailing the elements influencing the success of European cross-border regions set the stage for eight subsequent discussions of transborder regionalism in other parts of the world. Examining the effects of policy, supranational organizations, government funding, histories of conflict and colonization, language, culture and economics on border regions, these studies escape the sometimes reductive binary of "local versus global" that dominates many studies of globalization.

A largely successful collection, *Holding the Line: Borders in a Global World* suffers from a few oversights. Some of the articles could benefit from engaging with globaliza-

tion scholarship. For instance, the absence of any mention of the concept of "glocalization," the adaptation of the global to the local, is a noticeable oversight in Thomas Edwards' discussion of the local/global interplay. Part Five, "A Borderless North America?," can be criticized both for redundancy and for neglecting other border regions. The section devotes four articles to the study of the same western region, "Cascadia," half of which discuss transportation in the region. Mexico shows up in only one article, which compares the San Diego-Tijuana region with Cascadia; other North American cross-border regions are scarcely mentioned. The redundancy in Part Five highlights another missed opportunity in the collection. While there is significant and potentially very fruitful overlap in themes and subject matter among many of the essays collected here, only a few contributors engage with other contributors' pieces in the collection.

These complaints aside, Nicol and Townsend-Gault's *Holding the Line* is well conceived and ought to be well received in a number of camps. Oriented toward "border studies," the collection showcases research primarily from geographers, political scientists, and legal scholars. "Borders," however, is a productive term of inquiry in other disciplines as well. The collection's historicized and politically-grounded case studies of transborder regionalism, and its critical approach to representing "borders," are relevant to literary critical and historical discussions of "borders" and "borderlands" as sites of transgression, marginality, or identity politics. The interdisciplinary discussion of "geoethics" by Stanley Brunn et al. and Anthony Asiwaju's provocative proposal for Europe to facilitate the growth of postcolonial African transborder regions, suggest lines of inquiry for ecocriticism and postcolonial studies. In offering perspectives on the workings of globalization at the border, *Holding the Line* is, perhaps most

obviously, relevant to scholarship drawing on theories of globalization.

The back cover of *Holding the Line: Borders in a Global World* does the collection something of a disservice when it suggests its contributors conclude that borders “are as much metaphors as they are realities.” *Holding the Line* does certainly, very credibly, demonstrate that “Borders in a Global World” are discursively constructed and not merely lines on maps. The strength of the collection, however, is that, starting from an understanding of borders as social constructions, its contributors undertake historically, politically, socially, and economically contextualized studies of particular borders. As “borders” becomes the conference topic *de jour* in humanities departments, this approach is especially welcome.

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## Historical Biography

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**Richard A. Davies**

*Inventing Sam Slick: A Biography of Thomas Chandler Haliburton.* U of Toronto P \$60.00

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Reviewed by David Staines

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Writing a biography raises a number of central questions for its author. In the first place, what kind of biography is appropriate? Historical? Psychological? Psycho-analytical? For Richard A. Davies, whose previous publications include his editions of *On Thomas Chandler Haliburton: Selected Criticism* (1979), *The Letters of Thomas Chandler Haliburton* (1988), and *The Haliburton Bi-centenary Chaplet: Papers Presented at the 1996 Thomas Raddall Symposium* (1997), the answer is evident. To write the biography of Thomas Chandler Haliburton, he has to write a historical biography, rooted in Haliburton’s letters and all other available source materials. For the first book-length, solo-authored study of Haliburton since V.L.O. Chittick’s *Thomas Chandler Haliburton* (“Sam Slick”):

*A Study of Provincial Toryism* (1924), this decision is wise: to assemble all his abundant archival research and to draw as full a portrait as possible of this compellingly controversial judge, writer, and politician.

Davies’ biography captures all the details of Haliburton’s life as it is set against the many volumes he authored throughout his life. From his first book, *A General Description of Nova Scotia* (1823), through his last, *The Season Ticket* (1860), his life is seen primarily in all the many volumes he penned. Davies’ title refers to Haliburton’s major creation, Samuel Slick of Slickville: “Haliburton has always been hidden behind his famous character, and he contributed greatly to this by slipping in and out of Slick’s persona as it served his purposes.” Sam Slick first appeared in September 1835 in the *Novascotian*, then in the book, *The Clockmaker, or The Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick of Slickville* (1837), and then in ten more Slick volumes published between 1838 and 1855. Throughout these later works the deeply Conservative vision beneath the surface of Slick’s wit threatened to extinguish Haliburton’s growing fame.

After *The Clockmaker*, Haliburton’s most successful work was *The Old Judge* (1849), where Haliburton injected his Tory creed as the book evolved from individual instalments into a complete volume. This book is the fullest statement of his conservative values. Haliburton wanted those benefits of modern technology “to support his conservative vision of life, and when they failed to do so, he retreated into the core values of conservatism, which he wished to defend.”

Most interesting is Davies’ discussion of Haliburton’s two three-volume compilations of American writing: *Traits of American Humour* (1852) and *The Americans at Home* (1854). The volumes reveal an intimate connection between Haliburton and American writers of humour sketches. He “affiliated himself with a tradition of humorous writing

fostered mainly by Southern planters, state governors, lawyers, and merchants . . . What astonishes us today is that Haliburton could conceive of pursuing a Conservative political agenda with any measure of plausibility through the ungentlemanly figure of Sam Slick.”

In 1841 Haliburton's wife died; at 45 years of age, he found himself a widower with a large family to support, children still to educate, and five daughters to see into the world. Twelve years later, he made the acquaintance of Mrs. Sarah Harriet Hosier Williams, a widow, who would eventually become his second wife. After Haliburton died in 1965, his wife stayed on at Gordon House in Isleworth, England, their final home, until 1867, when she held a large sale of furniture and china items. “At the sale, the South Kensington Museum bought a selection of her Battersea enamels. She died in penury at Bridge House, Richmond, in 1887, and lies buried in the same Isleworth Grave as Haliburton.”

Although much room remains for a careful consideration of the charges of racism levelled against Haliburton by such scholars as George Elliott Clarke in his 1990s articles, Davies has done Haliburton and Canadian literary scholars a great service by bringing together all the historically relevant materials in his masterful biography.

## Représentations et poubellisation de l'autre

**Daniel Castillo Durante**

*Les dépouilles de l'altérité.* XYZ 25,00 \$

Compte rendu par Pamela V. Sing

Dans *Du stéréotype à la littérature* (1994), Daniel Castillo Durante a souligné que le stéréotype constitue une « matrice générative » pour tout texte. Il en résulte le « pour-risoir de signes » qu'est la littérature moderne. Dans *Les dépouilles de l'altérité*, l'auteur prolonge ses réflexions sur la tyrannie

du cliché en se penchant sur la représentation de l'altérité en Occident. Puisque le principe de représentation produit des images fragmentées et figées, nos perceptions de l'autre le réduisent à des lambeaux. Qu'il s'agisse du « Je qui est un autre » ou de « l'être en chair et en os qui ne fai[t] pas partie de la majorité », sa « re-présentation » le déforme, le transforme en « épiluchure stéréotypée ».

Or, les paroles artistiques, notamment dans la littérature et les arts visuels, sont empreintes du désir d'échapper à cette pratique réductrice : ouvertes au divers, elles brisent le carcan « stéréotypal » dans lequel est « celé » l'autre. Ce faisant, elles opèrent une « dépétrification » et, par conséquent, une libération. Castillo Durante avance le concept de « dépouille » dans le but de réfléchir sur ce processus de libération et de « montrer l'art comme une pratique hantée par la perte ».

Organisé en sept chapitres, l'essai traite, entre autres, de diverses épistémologies de l'altérité, de ses rapports avec le langage et avec la sexualité, et de son usage subversif dans la photographie, la peinture et la littérature. Réflexions théoriques et analyses se nourrissent de références d'ordre social, culturel, politique, philosophique, ethnologique, psychanalytique, étymologique, et j'en passe. L'Index onomastique énumère cent cinquante éléments et si, à des fins pédagogiques, il y avait eu un glossaire, celui-ci reprendrait des termes tels que « sémiocratie », « tanathographie », « cleptocratie », « piquetero » et « illectronisme ». La présentation dialogique des discussions théoriques souligne la complexité ou l'ambivalence de la question. Si certaines analyses s'avèrent « métastéréotypales », au sens où elles portent sur les aspects les plus commentés de différentes œuvres classiques, celles qui portent sur les arts visuels soulignent efficacement le processus de mise en dépouilles à l'œuvre dans diverses représentations de l'altérité.

Un si court compte rendu de l'ouvrage ne saurait donner une idée juste de la pléthore d'érudition qu'il offre à ses lecteurs. Incontestablement, il pousse à la réflexion.

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## Literature as History

**Denis Saint-Jacques et Maurice Lemire, dir.**

*La Vie littéraire au Québec.* PU Laval 45,00 \$

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Reviewed by E.D. Blodgett

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The years covered by the fifth volume of *La Vie littéraire au Québec* are 1895–1918. For those who read literary history as others read detective novels, the dates are always significant. In this history taken as a whole, with some obvious exceptions (1764, 1806, 1839), the chosen dates are somewhat difficult to understand, and they are not always clearly justified. But for those who seek a narrative of literary evolution in Quebec since its inception in 1764, the year the printing press arrived from Philadelphia, the title of the series poses already interesting issues. It does not claim to be a history, but rather a description of the literary *life* of the province. The word is properly understood as a borrowing from Russian formalism, notably, *literarni byt*, and designed to direct the reader's attention to the literary process itself as an activity that takes place under certain historical conditions, such as education, that shape the framework of its development and that is produced by various kinds of writers who emerge from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. It goes on to describe the market in which writers and their work participate, how books reach their publics through newspapers, bookstores, and libraries, what kinds of texts are admired or not, and how they are read or kept, if possible, from the public's eye.

This structure found in each volume asserts that every period undergoes the same evolution which varies according to the historical moment, the actors, the ideological concerns, in other words, the material con-

ditions in which texts circulate. Based in the theory of such thinkers as Jürgen Habermas, Michel Foucault, Jacques Dubois, and Pierre Bourdieu, the history argues eloquently and at length that literature is a discursive activity that takes place under specific historical, economic, and sociological conditions. Thus the initial chapter devoted to historical conditions is somewhat deceiving. It suggests that history, as is so often the case in literary history, is the scene against which literary activity occurs: it is only announced in order to be left behind. We are to understand, however, that literary history is primarily to be seen in its activity as a "discursive formation," to use Foucault's expression cited in the book's prefatory remarks. It is history constructed as an intense conversation in a room where the walls consist of parliamentary decisions, wars, and strikes, and from which there is no way out.

The subtitle of the volume is the slogan "Sois fidèle à ta Laurentie," chosen to mark both the rise of nationalism during the period (1895–1918) and the movement toward an autonomous literature in Quebec, which is one of the larger designs of the history as a whole. Because the acquisition of autonomy always faces obstacles, the literary life of the province cannot be said to unfold, as literary historians often remark; rather, it emerges as the consequence of struggle against competing interests, particularly the Church. It would be incorrect to assume, however, that the Church was constructed entirely as the enemy by the burgeoning nationalism of the period, for, in fact, many of the values of nationalism were fostered by the Church. As a consequence, the French authors that carried the most weight in Quebec were not the avant-garde of the period, but the more conservative writers, such as the novelist Maurice Barrès and the literary historian Ferdinand Brunetière. Paradoxical as it may seem, the way into the future appears as anti-modern



in retrospect, and the École de Montréal, fascinated as it was by Baudelaire and his successors, was frowned upon by the new nationalists as too exotic.

If the argument is driven by the exotics, on the one hand, and the regionalists, on the other, the structure of the book places these two dominant camps into several contexts in order to demonstrate continuously and on every level how wide the argument was. Not only did it reflect upon, and participate in, the argument as it played out in France, but also it belonged to a larger struggle taking place in Canada. After what one might call the Post-Confederation Interlude, the permanent and unresolved issues of biculturalism arose intensely at the turn of the century, and the Manitoba School Question, the Boer War, and the Conscription Crisis, are, among others, woven into the formation of Quebec's cultural identity. Baudelaire and his admirers could hardly respond to these issues; Louis Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine* did resoundingly. As the authors persuasively argue, however, the novel's importance, along with several other cultural signs of regional coherence, can only be understood through attention to the operation of the literary institution.

As they indicate, the literary institution is primarily a process which begins in the cultural formation of the agents (not all of whom are authors) and ends in the preparation of texts for the reader. At its best, it is self-regulatory; at its worst it is interfered with by such means as Church censorship. Thus, regionalism could be fostered so long as it did not drift into naturalism, as a result of which the censorship, for example, of Albert Laberge's *La Scouine* (1918) by Archbishop Bruchési remained in effect for over half a century. *Le terroir* was only acceptable as the ideal constructed in the nineteenth century. Its life as a work of literature is in some respects more interesting as an aspect of publication and diffusion

during which it was largely dependent on periodicals, on the one hand, and libraries, on the other, both of which are studied in detail. One of the more interesting moments concerns the erection of the Montreal Public Library which took some 24 years to be completed because of the fears and objections of Bruchési toward secular writing.

Because the theme of the book is the operation of the institution, less than a third of its space is dedicated to literature in its published form. Those acquainted with literary histories published in English Canada may wonder at this, but *La Vie littéraire au Québec* addresses both literary manifestations and everything that surrounds them. Although the title intentionally avoids the word "history" or, more properly, "*histoire*," it avoids raising expectations which often are not provided by history. The practice of most histories is to provide historical material in the form of dates and what are chosen as decisive and often political events as a scene against which texts are projected but not given intimate connection. Emphasis on the literary institution both loosens texts from decisive events, on the one hand, but tightens it, on the other, by projecting a variety of activities that are full of analogous echo. Thus the argument over bilingualism in Manitoba is responded to in Quebec by the Société du parler français au Canada (founded 1902). This society in turn, through the activities of Father Camille Roy, became one of the active forces in the regionalist movement. Thus, not the least of the many pleasures this history provides is to consider events, texts, and authors in several contexts, each of which modifies our impression of them. For example, Louis Hémon, the author of *Maria Chapdelaine*, enters in the section under foreign authors who have contributed to the literature of French Canada with a brief biography, remarks on his position in the canon, and the section emphasizes his desire for travel and adventure, which, unfortunately, killed him

shortly after his completion of the novel. He was struck and killed by a train. Later, he is mentioned, fittingly, in a section on travel literature, in which he bears witness to the efforts made to stimulate emigration from France to Quebec. His major function in the history, however, is the role his novel plays in affirming those ideological values which confirm its position among regionalist texts. The novel returns finally in the section that addresses reception, and its frequent editions confirm as well its canonical position.

It need not be said that the more conventional manner in literary history of treating an author and a text is to take them together and discuss them once, which almost invariably constructs a text according to a single function in a canon. *La Vie littéraire au Québec* is distinctive in that it constructs authors and texts as objects of a multiple perspective. While it is true that the struggle for autonomy is repeated in various ways through all the volumes, the project is designed to argue how autonomy is achieved. In each volume greater degrees of autonomy are acquired, but autonomy does not have a fixed manner of being. Certainly, autonomy in respect of the Catholic Church is frequently sought, but as this volume takes care to demonstrate, the role of the Church was not entirely negative. The same is true of political interference, which is why, as the authors assert, “les lettres forment d’abord un champ général, jusqu’à ce qu’une certaine autonomie leur accorde un pouvoir relatif sur leur évolution (XIV).” The shape of autonomy is not always the same simply because it is what is at stake in a field that is in constant variation. Thus, deeply imbricated in the history is the signal fact of its temporality: at every moment change and struggle are present or implied, no final conclusion is set forth, and the repositioning that always happens in time is allowed to happen as each volume proceeds, modifying what has already occurred. Of

course, not every historian of literature will want to make such assiduous use of the institution, but the sensitivity shown toward the passing away of time and its effect on culture and especially the canon is exemplary, reminding one often of Horace’s notion that “multa renascentur quae iam cecidere, cadentque / quae nunc sunt in honore” (*Ars poetica*).

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## Come Fly with Them

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**Graeme Gibson**

*The Bedside Book of Birds: An Avian Miscellany.*  
Doubleday \$39.95

**Candace Savage**

*Crows: Encounters with the Wise Guys of the Avian World.* Greystone \$27.00

Reviewed by Travis V. Mason

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All birds exist, including those  
we only hoped to see

—Don McKay

Writers and artists have been attracted to birds for as long as anyone can remember. For some reason—increasing concern for the health of the earth, the possible sighting of thought-to-be-extinct ivory-billed woodpeckers in Arkansas—birds are sexier than ever, and publishers know it. In his introduction to *The Bedside Book of Birds: An Avian Miscellany*, Graeme Gibson reminds us that birds not only “feature in creation myths, in sagas and parables, in liturgies, and in fairy tales, but poets, writers, storytellers and artists in all ages have found them a fertile source of imagery and symbol.” True to the miscellany form, Gibson has collected illustrations and excerpts from natural history, novels, folk/oral tales, and poetry by dozens of artists and over a hundred writers. While illustrations by well-known figures J.J. Audubon and Mark Catesby dominate, Gibson includes numerous plates from such lesser-known artists as F.O. Morris, Karel Svoboda, and H.C.

Richter. Only a handful of authors are quoted more than once, none more than twice. This variety is one of the book's chief strengths.

According to Gibson, birdwatching for some "provides a personal and very special entrée into the natural world." While the double meaning evoked by the term "entrée" seems unintentionally problematic, Gibson's book nevertheless provides a series of intriguing entrances into the world of avian art, literature, and natural history. The numerous and well-chosen epigraphs to each of *Bedside's* nine sections—what Gibson calls "habitats"—notwithstanding, each excerpt itself acts epigraphically to suggest a way in to thinking about the myriad relations between birds and humans. Organizing his choices somewhat arbitrarily to focus on everything from folk tales ("Death Comes as a Rooster") to nostalgia ("Some Blessed Hope"), to historic uses of birds ("A Bird in the Hand") to avian revenge ("Then the Birds Attacked"), Gibson offers little in the way of analysis; often his two-page introductions to each section are unnecessarily brief and irritatingly aloof.

While the bibliography and image acknowledgements are extensive, I do wish the index included names of birds and illustrators instead of just authors of the texts collected in the miscellany. That said, the book's other chief strength is its aesthetic beauty; this is a gorgeous book—a pleasure to pick up and peruse during those intervals between hard work and hard play.

According to Candace Savage, crows are one species of bird that do not make much of a distinction between work and play. If books about birds are highly marketable right now, *Crows: Encounters with the Wise Guys of the Avian World* suggests that members of the family *corvidae* are particularly popular. A far less ambitious book than *Bedside*, *Crows* still manages to cram a lot of potentially useful information into a relatively small package. This is a readable

piece of popular nature writing, accessible because of a deft juxtaposition of interesting anecdotes and firsthand accounts of scientific discoveries (some of which dispel conventional myths regarding "bird brains" and appear here for the first time).

Savage's attempt to incorporate mythic tales and natural histories about crows in the midst of her prose, however, has a tendency to interrupt rather than complement one's reading. This book is not well-suited to digressions, whereas Gibson's is a book of digressions.

If Gibson's book offers a series of entrances, though, Savage's is an adequate, if not entirely satisfying, entrée into the avian world inhabited by various corvids. In the end, and for what it's worth, despite unavoidable slippages into anthropocentric discourse, *Crows* is more about the birds themselves and less about birds *vis-à-vis* humans than *The Bedside Book of Birds*.

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## Fenced In

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Jane Urquhart

*A Map of Glass*. McClelland & Stewart \$34.99

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Reviewed by Myrl Coulter

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Jerome McNaughton, the artist-photographer in Jane Urquhart's latest novel, *A Map of Glass*, bemoans the superficial reception his gallery exhibit, "Fence Lines," receives from critics who miss the intent of his tactile montage. "Fence Lines" consists of manipulated photographs of ruined fences that depict the "sense of loss he felt in the face of decay." This sense takes Jerome to Timber Island and his rendezvous with Andrew Woodman's corpse, encased in a floating chunk of ice after becoming lost in a blizzard of snow and Alzheimer's disease. The encounter between artist and corpse brings Sylvia Bradley, Andrew's lover, into Jerome's studio and the two damaged souls reveal their personal histories as they delve into the notebooks Andrew left behind.

Sylvia is simultaneously the weakness and the strength of the novel. Quietly capable, Sylvia's actions show her to be more independent than her family and medical history indicate; yet, when Sylvia's husband finally retrieves her from Jerome's studio, she meekly returns to a life where the past and all its assumptions build invisible fences around her. The curious relationship between Sylvia, a woman who suffers from a vague social disorder that prevents her from achieving autonomy in her life, and Jerome, the young artist whose autonomous existence stems from a family heritage steeped in social disorder, raises more questions than it answers. Why is Jerome so traumatized by finding Andrew Woodman's body that he needs to spend hours with Andrew's middle-aged married mistress? Clearly capable of taking care of himself in dangerous environments, Jerome would no doubt have been exposed to death before Andrew's body floats by him one early spring day. Nevertheless, *A Map of Glass* effectively depicts the decay that Jerome determinedly investigates as he sets out to map the unmappable.

All the familiar Urquhart motifs are present in *A Map of Glass*: graveyards, angels, ghosts, stark landscapes, war memorials, and the cruelty of a history that forgets "first the Native peoples and then the settlers, whose arrival had been the demise of these peoples, settlers in whose blood was carried the potential for [Jerome's] own existence." Written in three sections, Urquhart's sixth novel is a contemporary story wrapped around a genealogical tale from the past, a novel that gestures gently and regularly to the five that preceded it. Evoking the excerpt from Margaret Avison's poem, "The Swimmer's Moment," that serves as the epigraph to Urquhart's first novel, *The Whirlpool*, the cat Jerome adopts receives the name 'Swimmer.' The middle section of *A Map of Glass* revolves around the story of Andrew's great-grandfather,

Branwell Woodman, and his shipbuilding business in southern Ontario, the name Branwell pointing directly back to Urquhart's second novel, *Changing Heaven*, in which both Emily Brontë and her brother, Branwell, have key roles. The activity of tracing human impact on landscape and landscape's impact on humanity is reminiscent of *Away*, Urquhart's third novel. The remote artist unable to communicate adequately with the woman in his life echoes Austin Fraser, the protagonist of *The Underpainter*, novel number four for which Urquhart won the Governor General's Award in 1997. And, with its references to war memorials, stone statues, and carved names of "dead boys who made the mistake of leaving home," *A Map of Glass* cannot help but summon Urquhart's first novel of the twenty-first century, *The Stone Carvers*. Always diligent about acknowledging the texts that have inspired each one of her novels, Urquhart is a novelist who uses intertextual elements to highlight the intrinsic themes in her work. With *A Map of Glass*, Urquhart demonstrates that she is well on her way to becoming her own intertextual allusion.

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## L'épreuve de la traduction

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**Hélène Buzelin**

*Sur le terrain de la traduction.* Gref 32,00 \$

**L.E. Vollick; Trad. par Pierre DesRuisseaux**

*Les Originaux.* Triptyque 20,00 \$

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Compte rendu par Robert Melançon

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Les travaux sur la traduction littéraire prennent souvent un tour abstrait et spéculatif, au point qu'un abîme semble s'y creuser entre la réflexion théorique et l'art modeste ment patient de la traduction. Le livre d'Hélène Buzelin repose sur une connaissance approfondie des recherches actuelles en traductologie, mais il échappe à toute hypertrophie théorique en se situant, comme l'indique son titre, « sur le terrain », c'est-à-dire dans la perspective concrète d'une

traduction à mener à terme sans qu'aucune difficulté ne puisse en être esquivée. Pour paraphraser le titre d'un livre fameux d'Antoine Berman, je définirais son entreprise comme « l'épreuve de la traduction ». Cette épreuve est décisive : le traductologue peut plaider dans l'abstrait, en ne se souciant que de la cohérence logique de sa démonstration, pour le *foreignizing* ou pour le *domesticating*, opposer la « traduction éthique » à la « traduction ethnocentrique », mais le traducteur doit bricoler des solutions *ad hoc* parce qu'il est aux prises avec les nuances d'un texte, avec ses rythmes, avec les difficultés du vernaculaire, avec les effets imprévus, on a presque envie de dire les dommages collatéraux, induits par les diverses stratégies de traduction. C'est là, certes, un vieux débat, entre théorie et pratique, mais Hélène Buzelin, traductologue et traductrice tout à la fois, le reprend avec brio, en apportant une contribution importante à la théorie de la traduction à partir d'un travail très attentif, tout en subtilité, sur un roman qui oppose au traducteur des difficultés sans nombre.

Hélène Buzelin ne s'était pas donné une tâche facile en s'attaquant à *The Lonely Londoners* de l'écrivain indo-trinidadien Samuel Selvon. Ce roman est devenu, depuis sa publication en 1956, un classique de la littérature postcoloniale en langue anglaise; faisant une large place au vernaculaire des immigrants de la Caraïbe en Angleterre, croisant plusieurs langues et plusieurs cultures, il offre le type même d'un texte hybride, postmoderne avant la lettre peut-être. L'utilisation du vernaculaire ou plutôt l'élaboration d'une langue poétique qui intègre en les transformant de nombreux éléments du vernaculaire entraîne, de divers points de vue, d'innombrables difficultés de traduction. S'il est impensable de transcrire cet idiolecte de départ dans une langue d'arrivée normée, il n'est sûrement pas simple d'en inventer un équivalent sans tomber dans les stéréotypes et sans produire

une série de distorsions tant le statut des vernaculaires varie d'un domaine linguistique à l'autre. Sur ces questions, les chapitres trois et quatre de *Sur le terrain de la traduction* offrent des modèles de sensibilité littéraire et de rigueur méthodologique, qualités très rarement associées. Le sixième chapitre, « À propos d'éthique », aborde une question trop rarement posée : « qui traduit? », et convoque dans le champ de la traductologie des problématiques élaborées en anthropologie et en ethnologie. Elles s'y révèlent extrêmement fécondes, et on ne peut qu'acquiescer à la conclusion d'Hélène Buzelin sur « la nécessité—voire, l'urgence—d'élargir la réflexion éthique et théorique au-delà des questions de ré-énonciation, au-delà du choix entre un *domesticating* conservateur ou un *foreignizing* révolutionnaire. »

S'il fallait une preuve de plus des ravages que font les cours de création littéraire dans les universités, on la trouverait dans *The Originals* de L.E. Vollick, où les clichés en tout genre se bousculent. Mais j'ai à rendre compte de sa traduction plutôt que de ce roman. Quelle que soit la médiocrité de l'original, la tâche du traducteur consistait à en proposer en français un équivalent. Ce n'est pas fait : « Le petit restaurant bourdonne de graisse et baigne dans une ambiance électrisante » n'a pas de sens et ne rend sûrement pas « The tiny restaurant buzzes with grease and an electric twinge ». Les dialogues ne sont parfois pas plus compréhensibles : « Qu'est-ce qui te prend aujourd'hui? » n'a pas le même sens que « What are you on today » et « Rien du tout » n'a pas le même ton que « I ain't on nothin', bitch. » On multiplierait de tels exemples; cela ne s'appelle pas traduire.

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## Souvenirs et découvertes

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**Louise Desjardins et Mona Latif-Ghattas**

*Momo et Loulou*. Remue-ménage 16,95 \$

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**Janine Ricouart et Roseanna Dufault**

*Les secrets de la Sphinx: Lectures de l'œuvre d'Anne-Marie Alonzo*. Remue-ménage 21,95 \$

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Compte rendu par Jeanette den Toonder

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Louise Desjardins et Mona Latif-Ghattas s'écrivent leur enfance dans un échange d'e-mails où elles adoptent la perspective de la petite Louise—Loulou—et la petite Mona—Momo. Ces souvenirs se concentrent sur leur vie de famille et les e-mails sont réunis dans un livre divisé en quatre parties où les membres de leur famille—des parents jusqu'aux oncles et tantes—sont les protagonistes. Les petites filles observent ces personnes qui les fascinent, qu'elles aiment et avec qui elles établissent un contact particulier, ou qui restent, au contraire, étrangères et peu compréhensibles. C'est le point de vue de l'enfant qui enregistre avidement le monde qui l'entoure et dont la naïveté est souvent évidente. Les petites filles ne sont pas encore directement touchées par les problèmes et les dangers du monde extérieur, mais elles sont très sensibles aux douleurs et aux souffrances de leurs proches, provoquées, par exemple, par la perte d'un jeune enfant ou le poids d'un mariage forcé.

L'atmosphère créée est celle d'une douce intimité: grand-maman lisant les miracles dans des revues religieuses avec sa petite-fille ou une tante prêtant sa robe de mariage à sa nièce lorsque celle-ci tient le rôle d'une princesse dans une pièce de théâtre. Ce qui frappe c'est que, malgré la distance entre les deux continents où grandissent les auteures, les différences entre la vie d'un enfant dans la ville du Caire ou dans le lieu isolé de Rouyn-Noranda ne semblent pas très grandes. C'est que les auteurs sont avant tout à la recherche de ressemblances; est-ce une coïncidence si le premier roman qui leur est offert à toutes les deux par une tante

est *Les Malheurs de Sophie* de la comtesse de Ségur?

Le voyage dans l'espace et le temps résulte en une série de tableaux d'enfance détaillés dans lesquels le lecteur n'arrive toutefois pas entièrement à pénétrer. Une sorte de barrière semble être créée par certaines descriptions trop distancées, comme si les auteures elles-mêmes se sentaient à certains moments trop éloignées de leurs paysages d'enfant.

Le voyage proposé dans *Les secrets de la Sphinx* passe par une multitude de facettes de l'œuvre d'Anne-Marie Alonzo; il se veut à la fois un hommage à la poète et une réflexion sur les formes et les thématiques de son écriture. En réunissant des textes plus personnels, s'adressant parfois directement à la poète, et des articles académiques, ce recueil offre la possibilité de découvrir l'œuvre d'Alonzo de différentes manières. Si l'insertion du texte-hommage de Mavrikakis dans la première partie et de la lettre de Ricouart adressée à « la Sphinx » qui clôt le recueil illustre les acquis de l'écriture féminine—celle-ci permet en l'occurrence une modification de la forme traditionnelle de l'ouvrage académique—, les rapports entre le 'je' de la critique et le 'tu' de la poète admirée sont tellement présents que la lectrice ou le lecteur a l'impression d'être exclu(e).

Par ailleurs, les lectures proposent divers points de vue mettant en valeur des éléments peu étudiés jusqu'ici, comme le politique et l'éthique, ou encore soulignant le contexte sociologique et historique dans lequel l'écriture d'Alonzo est profondément ancrée. Plusieurs articles se concentrent sur un livre spécifique. Ainsi sont élaborés la question de l'inscription dans la littérature lesbienne, le caractère postmoderne de l'écriture alonzoienne à travers les images de l'errance et de la déterritorialisation, les rapports mère/fille, la théâtralité de son écriture, l'utilisation de la nouvelle autobiographie, ainsi que l'écriture épistolaire.

Ces contributions solides et lucides montrent la portée de l'œuvre de cette auteure dont la mort, en juin 2005, a attristé les lectrices et les lecteurs de la littérature québécoise. Les livres qu'elle a laissés offriront à des générations à venir beaucoup de secrets à découvrir.

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## Lectures sur mesure

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**Marguerite Primeau**

*Dans le muskeg*. Plaines 14,95 \$

**Sophie Lepage**

*Lèche-vitrine*. Triptyque 19,00 \$

Compte rendu par Christine Poirier

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Des champs de blé, un petit village canadien-français isolé du Nord albertain, bastion francophone dans l'Ouest du pays, un jeune instituteur de bonne volonté qui s'y installe . . . Un parallèle s'impose au lecteur de *Dans le muskeg*, premier roman de Marguerite Primeau, paru en 1960 et réédité en 2005 aux Éditions des Plaines, avec *La petite poule d'eau* de Gabrielle Roy, publié en 1950. Les deux romans racontent les nombreuses difficultés engendrées par le double isolement, géographique et linguistique, des communautés francophones de l'Ouest, ainsi que l'espoir et le rêve un peu illusoire de constituer une société autonome. La comparaison des deux romans ne se fait toutefois pas à l'avantage du premier, dont l'intrigue, une histoire d'amour impossible entre l'instituteur et une Métis, finit par se perdre au milieu de tous les problèmes sociaux qu'il dénonce : la prostitution des Métis, le racisme, le manque d'éducation, les conflits entre les protestants et les catholiques, entre les « Anglais » et les « Français », etc. La psychologie des nombreux personnages est à peine développée, et la langue qui les décrit, peu soignée, ne pourrait être plus éloignée du style, du pouvoir d'évocation, de la faculté d'émouvoir propos à Gabrielle Roy. *Dans le muskeg*, ce premier roman de Marguerite Primeau, aujourd'hui professeur

émérite au Département des langues romanes de l'Université de Colombie-Britannique, bénéficie d'une préface plutôt flatteuse de Pamela Sing, qui reconnaît en lui le précurseur d'une littérature francophone minoritaire de l'Ouest du pays. Sans aspérités et relativement prévisible, il semble se destiner à être lu par des élèves en apprentissage du français dont les parents ou les professeurs seraient un peu frileux.

Le roman *Lèche-vitrine* de Sophie Lepage, également un premier-né, est d'un tout autre genre. Profondément urbain et ancré dans l'actualité, il se lit d'une traite et ne démord pas de sa ligne directrice. Dans la jeune trentaine, Marie, recherchiste pour des magazines féminins, souhaite trouver l'amour idéal à partir de critères très précis. Son alter ego, Philippe, exprime ainsi la morale et le moteur de l'histoire : « J'aime bien le fait de désirer les choses, on les apprécie plus quand on les obtient enfin. » Cousue de fil blanc, la métaphore de la consommation amoureuse qui oriente le roman est martelée d'un bout à l'autre, jusqu'à presque en devenir une thèse ; fortement écolo, le roman prône la consommation « responsable », tant en amour que dans la vie quotidienne. Composé d'un chassé-croisé amoureux, *Lèche-vitrine* ne va pas sans évoquer la série télévisée *La vie, la vie*, écrite par Stéphane Bourguignon pour Radio-Canada au début des années 2000 : quarante-six chapitres de deux ou trois pages, comme autant de scènes, nous présentent l'histoire en alternant les points de vue de Philippe et de Marie, les deux héros qui se croisent sans se voir. Les autres personnages sont des stéréotypes ambulants, du gai flamboyant à la jeune femme hypermatérialiste et superficielle, au milieu desquels le personnage principal ne se reconnaît pas. Avec ses chapitres très courts et son écriture visuelle, le roman semble conçu pour la lectrice moyenne, qui souhaite se retrouver dans ce qu'elle lit, porter un regard moqueur sur elle-même tout en se donnant

l'impression de réfléchir sur la condition du monde. Au-delà du concept fort « vendeur » du roman qui se consomme rapidement, la simplicité désarmante des phrases et leur maladresse pourraient ennuyer certains amateurs de « classiques » français. *Lèche-vitrine* aurait pu cibler un public adolescent en mal d'amour, mais il pourra aussi très bien convenir au lectorat des magazines féminins auxquels Sophie Lepage contribue. Il se lit rapidement, facilement, sans arrière-pensée, sinon avec l'impression lancinante de lire une nouvelle version « québécoise », heureusement intellectualisée, des célèbres romans Harlequin.

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## Before We Forgot

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**Betty A. Schellenberg**

*The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain.* Cambridge UP \$93.95

Reviewed by Michael Wells

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The late 1980s saw a renewed interest in eighteenth-century British women's writing. Jane Spenser's *Rise of the Woman Novelist* (1986), Kathryn Shevelow's *Women in Print Culture* (1989), and Janet Todd's *The Sign of Angellica* (1989) all contributed to the rediscovery of a number of important eighteenth-century women authors who had long been deemed noncanonical and unworthy of study. In the 20 years since Spenser's book first appeared, a number of valuable studies have emerged that have examined eighteenth-century British women writers in further detail and helped to ensure that their work has been included on many university course syllabi. But Schellenberg believes that important work remains to be done on the nature of the professional writing careers that women had in the eighteenth century and on how the work of women was received by their contemporaries. Schellenberg argues that the standard frameworks that scholars have used to examine women's writing in the eighteenth century tend to

obscure our understanding of those writers and their role in the republic of letters.

Schellenberg attempts to move past what she sees as the received binary of "oppressor" and "victim" in most historiography of women's writing by examining the career trajectories of a group of women writers in the mid-to-late eighteenth century. The goal of Schellenberg's study is to question the assumption that gender is the "prior explanatory cause overriding all other causal factors" for women writers in the eighteenth century. Instead, Schellenberg tries to show that while gender was an important determining factor for women writing in the period, it was not the only factor, and not always the most significant factor. For the relegation of women writers to the domestic sphere, Schellenberg finds, is not the seamless process that many critics make it out to be. By reexamining the careers of a group of women writers who have been traditionally seen as epitomizing and facilitating this relegation to the domestic sphere, Schellenberg wants to show that, far from undermining women's writing in the period, these writers were productive, and professionalized members of the republic of letters.

Schellenberg revisits the received historiography of women writers in the mid-to-late eighteenth century through a series of case studies on Frances Sheridan, Frances Brooke, Sarah Scott, Sarah Fielding, Charlotte Lennox, Edward Kimber, the Minife sisters, and Frances Burney. In these case studies, Schellenberg outlines the career trajectory of each author by examining a variety of their works, their biography, their correspondence, as well as the contemporary reaction to their work. Schellenberg wants to show how gender impacted each of these authors and the trajectory of their careers in specifically individualized ways. For example, Schellenberg illustrates that having established her career in London, Sarah Fielding's decision to decrease her costs by moving to Bath meant that she



could afford to be more selective about what she wrote than her London-based contemporary Charlotte Lennox (who needed to remain in London for the sake of her husband's career). Therefore, rather than conforming to a specific and preformed conception of what constituted a female literary career, or simply adopting a deferential position to the established male authors of the mid-century—Richardson, Fielding, or Smollett—Schellenberg is able to illustrate that writers such as Sarah Fielding and Charlotte Lennox had to actively fashion their literary careers in the face of the demands of a complex literary marketplace.

What makes Schellenberg's book such a useful addition to the study of eighteenth-century women's writing is the way she uses vast amounts of documentary material to support her position that such writing had a more complex relation to the literary marketplace than the received historiography of the period has traditionally suggested. Schellenberg effectively upsets the received teleology of the decline of women's writing in the mid-to-late eighteenth century with her detailed case studies. However, as Schellenberg herself admits, the specificity of these studies prevents her from being able to provide a definitive picture of women writing in eighteenth-century Britain or why it ultimately needed to be recovered in the late twentieth century. Therefore, instead of providing a new historiography of women's writing in the mid-to-late eighteenth century, Schellenberg has offered a challenge to future scholars to reexamine the period in a more exhaustive way.



## Biographing Alice Munro

**Robert Thacker**

*Alice Munro: Writing Her Lives: a Biography.*  
McClelland & Stewart \$39.99

Reviewed by Héliane Ventura

Various words can be used to speak of the pregnant moment: one can think of Aristotle's *anagnorisis*, Wordsworth's "spot of time," Woolf's "moment of being," or Joyce's "epiphany." In the context of a biography, the "defining moment" is perhaps the most accurate term. It is around one such moment that Robert Thacker has built his biography of Alice Munro. Thacker argues that the great fact of Munro's career was her return home. He stresses the period when she decided to leave British Columbia and her first marriage to come back to Huron county. This homecoming constitutes for him her coming into her own. Only when she is back among her "material" can she become Alice Munro. Thus, Thacker begins his biography *in medias res* at this juncture, this moment of special awareness, this flare into revelation. It is 1974; Munro has been back in Western Ontario for a year; she has undertaken what Thacker calls, quoting Munro, her "long necessary voyage from the house of marriage." In different words, she has had the strength to "force the moment to its crisis," and to return where she originally belonged. At this crucial point of new self-knowledge, she is about to start her new life, a life that will lead her to literary success.

From this primordial moment, Thacker takes us back to ancestors, parents and home in Wingham or more specifically Lower Town (pronounced Loretown), into marriage and children and Munro's Bookstore in Victoria, BC, and he takes us forward to Clinton, Ontario, and the new collections of short stories she regularly published since her return home. This is a very cogent argument, very seductive in its hinging arrangement. It is a well-founded hypothesis,

documented with factual evidence concerning the period that preceded the move and the one that followed it.

I seem to have located one inaccuracy concerning the conference in Waterloo in honour of Alice Munro, which took place in 1982. Thacker suggests that Munro saw a one-person production of *Forgiveness in Families*. My memory of it is that she actually read the story herself. I happened to be in the audience and fell under the spell of her reading: she was glowing with wit and mischievousness. There was no shyness in her: like Pauline (a character from a 1998 story) she was basking in the “glare of an important dream,” the glorious light of lionization, and obviously felt very much at home. I am not suggesting, as Thacker does, that she necessarily felt at home in Waterloo, but that maybe the stage was a congenial place to her.

Thacker’s hypothesis about coming home is predicated on a territorial construction which posits Munro in Huron County as Faulkner is posited in Yoknapatawpha, Laurence in Manawaka, Morris in Nebraska. Thacker constructs a situated, territorialized version of Munro that roots her in South Western Ontario and he refrains from opening the way to alternative routes: could it be that the country where Alice Munro lives, like Miss Marsalles’, is located in an imaginative otherness? Rather than territorialized in the fixedness of her home county, I tend to envisage Munro as constantly in the process of deterritorializing herself.

As Thacker mentions, Munro and her husband Gerald Fremlin bought a condominium in Comox, on Vancouver Island, BC, not far from Victoria, the city that he makes so much of her having left. Why do they commute from Ontario to British Columbia? What is it that sets them going? When does their migration take place? Is there a pattern, a ritual? Thacker does not specifically say. Couldn’t we hypothesize that these transcontinental drives or train

journeys (or flights?) are seasonal routines deeply rooted in Munro’s psyche? Couldn’t these “distant wooing of parts” of herself and this reversing back and forth from Ontario to BC constitute the psychological, geographical and conceptual vagrancy or truancy that Munro invites us to indulge in, throughout her works?

Munro’s stories are built on the principle of diversion, detour, deferral; couldn’t we hypothesize a similar in-between, errant pattern for her life? Rather than in terms of Thacker’s fixed location, I imagine Munro’s life in terms of Deleuze’s line of rupture, his line of flight that allows the subject to embark on a clandestine journey, away from closed segments, into the fluidity of another country that is still in the process of being charted. Munro is a puzzle that cannot be easily solved, and it seems to me that any attempt at pinpointing an origin is bound to limit the perspective. Of the origin, Benjamin said it was like a whirlpool in a river that kept moving on. I would tend to think that Munro’s defining moment is constituted along such on-going process.

I appreciated Thacker’s going to and fro between facts and fiction and his identifying their intricate commingling as, for example, the magic instance of the payphone turning into a slot machine, which is described in “Providence” and comes directly from Munro’s experience with a phone call that her agent, Virginia Barber, placed from a payphone in Toronto. I also appreciated Thacker’s laying the emphasis on the importance of visual artifacts in Munro’s life, such as a painting by Hopper or another one by Chagall that is implicitly alluded to in one of the latest stories from *Runaway*.

But Thacker’s goal in writing Munro’s lives is not primarily to identify influences and reconstruct the psychological motivations that caused her to write some of the finest short stories in world literature. His aim seems to have been to reconstruct the socio-economic conditions of her career,

from the first story in a university magazine to the eleventh collection published with Douglas Gibson as her editor. Thacker is not interested in the exploration of interiority or the unmasking of contrary and hidden motives. His is not a Freudian biography, or a biography about the secrets of the soul: it is a biography which scrupulously respects the privacy of the author and steers clear of fanciful, nomadic or wayward speculation. It is a very serious biography that indeed establishes Robert Thacker as “the man who knows more about Alice Munro than anyone not named Alice Munro.”

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## Taking Stock

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**Rosemary Neering**

*The Canadian Housewife: An Affectionate History.*  
Whitecap \$29.95

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Reviewed By Erika Behrlich

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Reading Rosemary Neering's *The Canadian Housewife*, I was struck by how precisely the book reflected the talents so cherished in its heroine: it is well organized and methodical in its enumeration of the housewife's duties, it effectively multi-tasks, outlines numerous categories of “huswifery,” as well as substantial marginalia, and it is able to put together “nutritious and attractive meals” with occasionally scant resources. Neering takes her reader on a journey from the homesteads of New France and Acadia in the seventeenth century to the quintessential Canadian suburban domicile in the 1950s, exploring the roles women played within the home from laundress and nurse, to housekeeper, to wife. Through each epoch of Canadian living, Neering describes the primary female responsibilities within the home, drawing from contemporary media, private journals, and scholarly editions to give her reader a picture of the Canadian “everywoman” of the period.

It is unusual, perhaps, to trace similarities between the homesteading pioneer women

of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the homemaking suburban women of the mid-twentieth century, but Neering's division of each chapter into the different tasks women had in the home encourages a strong sense of continuity. Indeed, reading the details of a Saskatoon woman's domestic routine at the turn of the twentieth century next to an eighteenth-century method of scrubbing plank floors in Upper Canada gives one the uncomfortable sense—certainly up until the 1950s, when the book ends its review—that the more things changed in Canada, the more they stayed the same. Neering chooses not to comment on this—to my mind remarkable—similarity between historical periods, giving instead what she terms an “affectionate” look at huswifery. Readers are thus left to draw their own conclusions about what they read: although she mentions subjects as diverse as domestic violence, death in childbirth, and the move away from the kitchen garden to the market, Neering withholds her opinion on them. Left to wonder if any conclusions can or should be drawn, the reader can't decide whether Neering invites a critical reading by leaving the field open, or discourages it by neglecting it herself. Neering's affection for her subject infuses the book, but it is difficult not to adopt some critical stance regarding the material. The book makes clear that while women were responsible for a substantial range of duties in the home, these all seem to have centred on making their husband's leisure time more enjoyable: with a clean house, healthy children, a meal on the hob, and an attractive woman by his side, *homo Canadianus* was free to relax after a day in the field or at the office. In our present age, in which women continue to struggle for equal pay and representation in the public sphere, this image can still sting.

With such a rich and long history to tell, Neering's book necessarily skims the surface of the housewife's experience in Canada;

because of her range of subtopics in each chapter, Neering cannot delve too deeply into any one without neglecting another. This economy maintains a high level of interest in each section, but occasionally may leave readers wishing for more. But like a generous hostess always ready with a second helping, Neering points her hungry readers in the direction of more by her use of substantial marginalia: quotations from recorded histories, private journals, advertisements, and cookbooks from each period help bring each era to life. The recipes are particularly compelling as they provide a sensory link with the past—although the recipes for food such as bannock (1915) and Eve's Pudding (1878) are more likely to be enjoyed than those for water gruel (nineteenth century) and "Beauty Salad" (1905). Donning an apron one evening to test one of Neering's collected recipes, I must admit I felt the mighty weight of legacy on my shoulders: four hundred years of scrubbing, caring, cooking, and sweeping were stirred into my Pouding Chomeur (Unemployed Pudding), a popular Quebec dessert during the Depression. It was delicious.

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## Exploring the Canadian Plains

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**Liz Bryan**

*Stone by Stone: Exploring Ancient Sites of the Canadian Plains.* Heritage House \$24.95

**Liz Bryan**

*The Buffalo People: Pre-contact Archaeology on the Canadian Plains.* Heritage House \$19.95

Reviewed by Linda Driedger

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Liz Bryan's *Stone by Stone* and *The Buffalo People* are both useful and readable. After 20 years of living north of Edmonton, my partner and I have returned to southern Alberta, and Liz Bryan's two books will be companions as we hike through that area and make our visits from Alberta through

Saskatchewan into southern Manitoba, the geography covered by her two books.

*Stone by Stone* is a pictorial guide to important sites on the Canadian plains with important cultural information, maps, pictures, photos and short descriptions of the sites. *The Buffalo People* is a more complete but still approachable archaeological overview of Canadian Plain sites. Although the two are organized differently, there is material overlap, and both are written for a general audience. Literature and site report reviews are not usually fascinating, but Bryan's books are a fair and complete review of the archaeology of the Canadian prairie that still manages to be interesting.

As Bryan points out, the prairies have been inhabited for 12,000 years. Both books provide the reader with an appreciation of the Canadian Prairie landscape and its ancient human occupation. Some of these sites of erratics, buffalo jumps, rubbing stones, effigies, vision quest sites, medicine wheels, and petroglyph and pictograph in Southern Alberta and Southern Saskatchewan were established before Stonehenge or the Pyramids in Giza. The descriptions of the temporal depth and the record of human occupation in the prairies are accompanied with a reverence for these historic and sacred sites, and, as *Stone by Stone* points out, these sites contain offerings that point to continued use as sacred space (offerings of tobacco and sage; the presence of effigies and prayer flags). Most of these sites have spectacular views, and many are places that we might admire without recognizing the cultural and historical significance of the place.

In addition to sites associated with First Nations now living in this area (Pekani, Kainai, Sisika, Stoney, T'suu Tina, Assiniboine, and Cree) there are interesting stories and legends of more far flung Native peoples. A Kokopelli pictograph found at Grotto Canyon originates from Hopi country and the accompanying oral history of the visit of the flute tribe to a land of ice and

snow completes the explanation of the hunchbacked flute player's presence in Canmore, Alberta. There is a review of Zephyr creek, which is a Kootenai site on the Eastern Slope of the Rockies. Many trade goods, from tobacco to dentalium shells, have been found in sites that have been excavated and reviewed in *The Buffalo People* and they point to far-flung trade routes. Another chapter focuses on the farming peoples that left earth lodges at Cluny, Alberta.

Liz Bryan inspires one to look at the prairie landscape in a different historical light. These prehistoric sites remain sacred space and warrant treatment as such. While some of these sites are not accessible to the general public, *Stone by Stone* provides information on how to access the open sites, and even provides websites that allow you to plan your trip across the prairie. *The Buffalo People* provides an overview of the scholarship on the pre-contact archaeology and early history of the sites.

Although summer seems like an obvious time for traveling in the Canadian prairies, many of these sites are best viewed when the grass is brown in late fall or emerging in early spring. The Napi stories that accompany some of the sites are well worth reading, and point to the cultural significance of the site. Napi "old man" is the creator trickster of the Blackfoot speaking peoples and Napi stories still describe and explain geographic features and the cultural significance of existing sites. The buffalo jump at Squaw coulee, for example, is where Napi gathered men and women together for the first time.

Bryan also provides tips on the best time of the day and year to visit these sites. As she points out, the large effigies of Napi are best seen from the air. Buffalo jumps are best viewed in late fall before the snowfall, when you can view the work of Richardson ground squirrels (gophers). In these gopher mounds you will see old buffalo bone with-

out disturbing the site. Bryan reminds that removing bone from these sites, including bone from mounds created by gophers, destroys the potential scholarship of the site and is illegal.

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## An Important Book

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**Christine Wiesenthal**

*The Half-Lives of Pat Lowther.* U of Toronto P  
\$65.00

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Reviewed by Mervyn Nicholson

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This is a depressing book. Not because it isn't a good book. It is. In some ways, a great book. No: it is depressing because Pat Lowther had such talent—I doubt Canada has produced any poet as good—and she had genuine greatness as a human being. Yet her life was hardship hardship hardship. Poverty, insecurity, incessant struggles to stay afloat psychologically and financially. And then, of course, that disastrous marriage. His emotional problems were so massive that he made her life a hell unimaginable even to a poet. Then he murdered her. He smashed her head in with a hammer, mutilated her body, threw her in a canyon. Afterward he presented himself as victimized by *her*. So offensive to his ego was her success that only her death could be a sufficient oblation. The subsequent trial gave him the spotlight he craved, grandstanding and holding forth about his wife's wickedness and the neglect of his genius. Even today, legal professionals involved remember Roy Lowther and shake their heads.

*The Half-Lives of Pat Lowther* is an extraordinary work of scholarship. Impressive skills of research, organization, and interpretation are everywhere evident. Not only a comprehensive biography but a literary-critical commentary, it surveys Lowther's writing from juvenilia to last words. And more: it considers the responses of writers, critics, and society. Despite minor weaknesses (was Lowther really a postmodernist?

do we need to know that Neruda was a cad? do we need to kick Dr. Johnson?), this is a book we have been needing for a long time, and the author deserves our gratitude.

But isn't it interesting that this is the *second* biography of Pat Lowther?—after Toby Brooks' warm appreciation—after a “non-fiction novel” about Lowther (Keith Harrison, *Furry Creek*)—after *Swann*, a novel that obliquely refers to Lowther, by Carol Shields, author of the curiously named *The Stone Diaries* (cf. Lowther's *A Stone Diary*)—after *The Pat Lowther Poem* by Gail McKay—and a film, *Water Marks*—and oh yes, wasn't there a play about Lowther? Not to mention the annual prize named after Pat Lowther. Yet almost nothing has been written about her *poetry*, as I discovered myself when I became hooked by one of the masterpieces of Canadian literature, the title poem of *A Stone Diary*. Apart from my 2003 article on Lowther and reviews and a very few graduate theses, there are maybe three articles since 1975, amounting to about 30 pages. *The Half-Lives'* attention to Lowther's poetry is painfully overdue. Ironically, it is a biography that gives us the most comprehensive discussion of her poetic *oeuvre*.

Ignoring Lowther's poetry is like a second murder. Wiesenthal lays out the basic problem of Lowther studies: she has become a symbol, a myth. Her death has eclipsed her life, her life's work. She reduces to the poet who was bludgeoned to death by her envious husband. When her murder is privileged, her poetry is metamorphosed into an adumbration of it; hence even when treated as a writer, Lowther becomes the poète maudite, cut off before her “promise” was fulfilled. Wouldn't she want to be remembered for her poetry and not her death? Like every good writer, she would want to be read, to be a source of power and pleasure to readers. Wiesenthal's demonstration of Lowther's intelligence and scope is, for me, the central point of her book, even apart from all the useful information (for example, Lowther's

title *Milk Stone* is not as it appears. “Milk,” we learn, is a *verb* here, not an adjective—a dramatic difference in meaning.)

Wiesenthal's key strategy is to put the murder and trial *first*, well before we get to Lowther's life. That way her life and work do not become a mere preface to her murder, a locating of her significance in that event. The sections that follow do not only treat Lowther biographically-chronologically, but approach her work in phases, revealing different facets of Lowther—her political commitments, her conscientious parenting, her publications and work for the League of Canadian Poets, and interestingly, her scientific-cosmological-environmental concerns. The picture that emerges is of an extraordinarily intelligent person, someone who was sophisticated, widely read, inventive and creative—and courageous. The strategy of putting the murder/trial first has definite benefits, but it also reinforces the problem, namely the orientation of everything about Lowther to her murder. A tiresome deconstructionist would say that Wiesenthal reinscribes what she rejects. Throughout, the murder remains a point of reference; the horror of the monstrous husband is a continuing beat in the background, to the point where even the reader begins supplying the mythical links. For example, when Wiesenthal quotes from “The Dig”: “*Will our bones tell / what we died of?*” (Lowther's italics), is it possible not to think of Pat Lowther's skull on display at the trial, with the murderer's hammer next to it?

The problem is huge. We have to read Lowther and appreciate her poetry instead of privileging her death. Yet that death is going to remain in the reader's imagination demanding attention. Only one thing can counter it: the poetry itself. This is the weakness of Wiesenthal's study: the book does not answer the question, *why read Lowther?* Why is she important to read? The importance of this fine book may lie in stimulating

the interest in Lowther *as writer* that she has always been denied. Now, how about a collected edition of Lowther's poetry?

## Multiple Horizons

**John Koerner**

*A Brush with Life*. Ronsdale \$39.95

Reviewed by Jack Stewart

John Koerner was born in Czechoslovakia in 1913. At age 15, he went to Paris, studied in Paul Colin's studio, and heard Othon Friesz's lecture on "arbitrary combinations of colour." On a trip to Italy, he "fell in love with the glowing colours and luminosity of Giorgione." After emigrating to Canada, he worked in the family forestry business and found British Columbia "a revelation." In 1957, he joined the faculty at the Vancouver School of Art under Jack Shadbolt. Their outlooks and styles diverged, but they "agreed that the colour of light within a painting can be the main theme." Other artist friends included Bert Binning, Lawren Harris, Joseph Plaskett, Takao Tanabe, Gordon Smith, and architect Arthur Erickson. Koerner discussed *ukiyo-e* prints (Hokusai, Hiroshige, Utamaro) with the Binnings and served on the Vancouver Art Gallery's Exhibition Committee with Harris, who introduced him to Emily Carr's work. His Uncle Walter, who was "concerned about the preservation of Haida carvings," commissioned *Bear* (1962) and *Raven and the First Men* (1980) by Bill Reid, helping to stimulate "the renaissance of West Coast native art" (37).

Several models influenced Koerner's style: (1) "the Japanese *emaki* scrolls, dating from the twelfth century and the monumental screens of the Taiga style" that gained power from "restrained use of colour"; (2) Hans Hoffman's teaching that "the perception of colour lies in its relation to adjacent colour"; (3) Giorgione's "close colour relationships"; (4) Matisse's colour harmonies

and inside/outside windows on the world (cf. *The Balcony Series*). Koerner, who regards colour sense as intrinsic to each artist, aims "to bring colours to life." His paintings are subtle, sensitive, contemplative. He is a passionate devotee of the simplified colour and design of Japanese art. As a Pacific Rim painter, he finds "similarities between our Gulf Islands in the ocean and the stones and azaleas in temple gardens." The inner dimension of his art dictates "colours that are the equivalents to inner calm, peace, and balance." For him, natural forms are metaphors for spiritual experience. Aiming at serenity rather than intensity, he prefers "flat colour" to impasto. In search of "unseen dimensions" (cf. his *Unseen Dimensions: Musings on Art and Life* [1997]), he follows the transcendental philosophy of Plato and the spiritual teachings of Bo Yin Ra, believing "that these ideas [are] related to [his] love of painting."

Koerner exploits spatial ambiguities and intuitively transforms landscapes, harmonizing nature with abstraction. He adapts Japanese spatial recession with its stratification of planes in his "multiple horizon" paintings with their continuous "flow of life." Avoiding the "tunnel vision" of Renaissance perspective, he makes forms "[rise] upward" on a flat surface as if floating in layers. He practises a Japanese "restraint," "indicating distance only by variations in colour and by perspectival recession." The subtle overlay of forms invites meditation. As in Japanese gardens, nature and art are so skillfully interwoven that they cannot be separated. Koerner's finished works retain a dynamic sense of process that reflects his vitalist view of art as creative experience.

After retiring from teaching at the University of British Columbia, Koerner bought a house with a view across Burrard Inlet to Point Atkinson, which became the focus of his *Lighthouse* series. He had already completed three series: *Lost City* (nostalgic of Prague), *Coast Glitter* (landscapes seen from

the sea), and *Compass Rose*. The *Italian Series*, the *West County Set*, and the *Numbers* motif (inspired by a metal number 5 reconfigured as “an abstract form”) were followed in the 1970s by *The Garden of Eden*, the colourful *African* series, and *The Pacific Gateway*—312 visionary works depicting the temporal “arch from here-and-now to another world” and juxtaposing Canadian and Japanese landscapes. Koerner was commissioned to do various murals, the largest being installed in the lobby of the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. Believing that “the purpose of all human beings, [is] to keep striving towards a deepened inner consciousness,” he is still actively creative at 92. Ronsdale Press has produced a stylish book that does credit to this fine artist with 65 full-page colour prints. *A Brush with Life* delights the eye and will appeal to anyone interested in Canadian—or Pacific Rim—art.

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## Fairy Tales and Tellers

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**Hjørdis Varmer. Illustrated by Lilian Brøgger. Translated by Tiina Nunnally.**

*Hans Christian Andersen: His Fairy Tale Life.* Groundwood \$19.95

**Karen Kain. Illustrated by Rajka Kupesic.**

*The Nutcracker.* Tundra \$24.99

Reviewed by Sarika P. Bose

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Hjørdis Varmer’s *Hans Christian Andersen: His Fairy Tale Life* is aimed at ten-year-olds while Karen Kain’s *The Nutcracker* claims to be for all audiences, but both these picture books seem best suited for younger children, with a deliberately naive and straightforward oral storytelling style and a lavish hand with illustrations.

It seems fitting that the biography of the legendary Danish children’s fairy tale writer, Hans Christian Andersen, has been written by one of Denmark’s most famous contemporary children’s book writers, Hjørdis Varmer. This new translation of the 2001 biography, strongly endorsed by the Danish

government, presents Andersen’s slow rise from an obscure, poverty-filled background to financial independence and literary recognition. This episodic chronicling of Andersen’s life follows a Cinderella narrative pattern: Andersen emerges as an underdog coming from a desperately poor family. The significant losses and difficulties suffered in his childhood, such as his father’s early death and replacement by a stepfather, set a pattern for feeling an outsider in his world. The fitful patronage of a godfather-like protector later helps him overcome his seemingly hopeless beginnings. The book often gives the child’s point of view, with its emphasis on the injustices of the adult and later, wider world.

This point of view also results in a portrait of Andersen as an ambitious and hardworking but somewhat confused character who must pick his way through the minefield of capricious adults and patrons who dole out favours only to snatch them back. Some of Andersen’s bizarre and unusual childhood experiences, like exposure to prisons and lunatic asylums, are seen to be only the more extreme manifestations of the harsh realities of working-class life—alcoholism, dangerous and soul-breaking factory work and dependence on the unreliability of rich patrons. Varmer implies that these experiences had a strong effect on Andersen’s imagination. His ability to read, unusual given his working-class background, his interest in artistic expression in the form of paper cutouts and puppet-making, and his talent for singing establish him as a naturally creative person. Andersen is also portrayed as a somewhat awkward misfit whose efforts at being accepted into various communities during his early years, whether in a textile factory or upper class circles, are couched in terms of his storytelling abilities.

A particularly arresting feature of this book is its use of Andersen’s own work, both in storytelling and in art. Varmer partly draws on Andersen’s autobiography, which



gives his biography authenticity, and also influences the teleology and child-centred perspective that never forgets injustice.

It is intriguing to see how Andersen's own paper cutouts have been incorporated into the colourful collage and crayon illustrations by Lilian Brøgger. The lively yet dreamlike style that incorporates influences from Chagall and Picasso is often sinister and nightmarish, with disproportioned heads or pictures that interrupt or loom over parts of the text. The illustrations, particularly in light of Andersen's own contributions, are interesting for adults, but might be disturbing for younger children.

In contrast, award-winning illustrator and dancer Rajka Kupesic draws in a Russian folk-decoration style to complement Karen Kain's retelling of Piotr Tchaikovsky's ballet, *The Nutcracker*. Although this folk style is, by its nature, static, the oil paintings are richly layered, and the book itself beautifully produced, with gilt-edged pages.

Karen Kain, former Principal Dancer of Canada's National Ballet, and its current Artistic Director, retells *The Nutcracker's* story as it was adapted and interpreted in James Kudelka's famously long-running production, and thus preserves a moment in ballet history. This book too, is structured episodically, as the children move from one fantastical adventure to the next. While there are some differences in names, characters and situations, many of the familiar episodes and relationships between characters remain. The Magician/Uncle is still sinister, and the Nutcracker still turns into a handsome prince and takes the children on adventures through the duration of the child-protagonist's dream. The focus on Russian culture is stronger than in more conventional versions of this tale.

The term "fairy tale" is appropriate for both books: *The Nutcracker* tells of magical characters and situations, while the progress of Andersen's life evokes the unusual challenges and great rewards commonly found

in fairy tale narratives. The dreamlike qualities of the illustrations add to the attractiveness of these picture books.

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## Old Stories, New Women

**Sandra Campbell and Lorraine McMullen, eds.**

*New Women: Short Stories by Canadian Women, 1900 – 1920.* U of Ottawa P \$24.00

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Reviewed by Judith Crichton

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The sepia photograph on the cover of this Canadian Short Story Library edition shows the torsos and faces of two women in white shirts with collars and ties, one behind the other, perhaps rowing a boat. What is significant is the purposefulness in the faces of the women, their comradeship and determination as they row their own boat at a time in our history when women's independence was not yet won.

*New Women* is a rich collection of 20 previously published but obscure stories by Canadian literary women, stories which "lie buried in back issues of newspapers and periodicals, lost to today's readers." Some of the contributors are well known; Mazo de la Roche, Lucy Maud Montgomery, Pauline Johnson, and Nellie McClung are writers whose works have persisted through time. Others are lesser known: such writers as Adeline Teskey and Edith Eaton have passed into obscurity. As collections of short fiction of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are few in number, especially collections featuring the writing of women, the purpose of this work is to bring some of these women to light that their stories may be enjoyed as literary form and social commentary and as a part of a rich, little known tradition of Canadian women's short fiction.

The stories, one for each year of the period, are organized by year of publication; the first is Adeline Teskey's "A Common Man and His Wife: the Ram Lamb" (1901); the last is J.G. Sime's "Munitions" (1919). Preceding

each selection is a brief biographical sketch of the author and her work as well as an explanatory introduction to the text itself, where it was published, its main themes and characters, how the selected text fits into the author's literary production and reflects the social temper of the times, and a list of suggested readings. Alice Jones' story, "At the Harbour's Mouth," for example, is set in the author's home province of Nova Scotia, where the protagonist is a young woman who has left her fishing village to work in Boston. Julia Perrier, part of a wave of more than 165,000 women who left Nova Scotia for the eastern seaboard of the United States between 1880 and 1920, is determined to make an independent life for herself as a dressmaker, one of the few careers open to women at the time. Without the historical information found in the story's introductory notes, it is unlikely that most contemporary readers would be aware of such relevant facts, and the story would lose much of its poignancy. The protagonist is torn between a traditional way of life and the old values, which include a husband to support her, and the appeal of making it on her own.

The editors have written a well-researched and well-supported general introduction. It is a capsule of the times, summarizing the events leading up to the turn of the century—massive urbanization, industrialization and immigration, with women entering the work force and careers as they never had before. This period witnessed the suffrage movement, the temperance movement, and the tragedy of World War I. Women would finally receive the vote across English-speaking Canada only in 1922, the editors inform us, but women's struggle for status as persons before the law would not be won until 1927. "Given such change, many women were energetically examining their relations with one another, with men and with society," not to mention treatment of the Aboriginal population, the moral and personal implications of the war, and their own

struggle with new and different expectations in society. The editors provide a compelling overview of each and every story in the collection, showing how they all fit together—even with their vastly different styles and language. In a tone that is both informative and illuminating, they bring knowledge and insight to the serious student and the curious reader.

The writers in the collection have honed the craft of short story writing to an art, expressive of women's specific concerns. Some of them wrote with gender-concealed pseudonyms, such as J.G. Sime or S. Carleton (Susan Jones); some wrote as males (for example, Gilbert Knox (Madge Macbeth) or Garth Grafton (Sara Jeannette Duncan). Others portrayed a different image of themselves, as in the case of Onoto Watanna (Winnifred Reeve), who adopted a Japanese identity to mask her own Chinese heritage in the face of widespread anti-Chinese racism. The editors point out as well that it was not uncommon for these writers to know each other and to draw support from what were sometimes close friendships. The language, style and setting of the stories offer local colour, representations of immigrant and native ways of speaking, and a vocabulary current to the time, while issues about work and domestic responsibility, about relationships with men, and about women's position in society will seem all too current to feminist readers. This anthology is a welcome window on the social history of Canada and on the heritage of Canadian women writers of short fiction in English Canadian literature in particular.



## Granting Audience

Arthur Davis and Henry Roper, eds.

*Collected Works of George Grant: Volume 3, 1960–1969.* U of Toronto P \$125.00

Reviewed by George Elliott Clarke

If *Collected Works of George Grant: Volume 2 (1951–1959)* reveals the emergence of philosopher George Parkin Grant (1918–1988) as a public intellectual, *via* his adult-education ventures and his radio sermons, *Volume 3 (1960–1969)* showcases the maturation of that “Mass Age” messenger. In that most critical decade of the post-World War II era, the 1960s, when the promise of liberal “improvement” and messianic science seemed affirmed by Marilyn Monroe glitz and moon-shot glamour, Grant appeared, with the rhetoric of a Hebraic prophet, pronouncing lamentation and pointing to the napalmed babies and blazing ghettos in the wings of JFK’s show-biz Camelot. A cigarette-puffing Daniel, Grant warned a dazzling, technicolour Belshazzar of the writing on the wall that spells out doom.

Nowhere was his dissent more powerfully and poetically expressed than in his accessible and fantastically popular *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (1965), which casts once-Prime Minister John George Diefenbaker (1895–1979) as a Miltonic hero, one who strove to prevent Canada from becoming a satellite of the “American Empire,” but was defeated by traitorous capitalists, “swinger” Liberals, and by the pro-US *zeitgeist* itself. *Lament for a Nation* is one-part Bob Dylan snarling, “Like a Rolling Stone,” but also one-part Malcolm X, denouncing the greed and violence of “imperialist” America. It is also a concentrated, pungent summary of Grant’s critique of modernity, wherein the “disappearance of Canada” becomes a tragicomic sideshow.

Grant’s argument depends on several iterated beliefs: 1) The “classical” Greek philosophers and “ancient” Hebrew prophets

viewed humanity as flawed creatures of potential divinity: not perfectible, but redeemable by reason (Plato) or by grace (Christ); 2) the modern philosophers (Bacon, Nietzsche, Marx, Rousseau, Hegel, Kant, Heidegger) view humanity—and Nature—as malleable and perfectible; 3) thus, liberal, secular humanists, to eliminate the evils of war, sickness, and poverty, seek to create one unified, rational, and scientifically mastered world; 4) this yearning must result, however, in cultural homogenization and the erasure of “petty” sovereignties (such as Canada’s), but also in unimaginably sophisticated tyranny: savage force either softened by media-mediated thought control or prosecuted by sci-fi weaponry. A quarter-century before Francis Fukuyama’s infamous “End of History” essay (1989), Grant had already argued that history was moving, *via* the aegis of the United States, toward the erection of a global police-state wherein humanity would submit to the soul-destructive gods of science, machinery, and pleasure. For Grant, this destiny is a denial of “human excellence.”

Like all conservatives, Grant believes in a Golden Age. For him, it seems to have been the Canada of his parents: quietly British, supposedly (somewhat) respectful of the French (Quebec), and conscientiously suspicious of the American Way. But now, in the 1960s, Canada is whoring after miniskirts and nuclear weapons; it seems to want to become *American*. For Grant, the larger issue is, however, that Canadians have embraced the ultimately amoral, US-championed liberalism of our time, based on the rhetoric of “rights” and the “triumph of the will”: if it feels good, do it. With such a philosophy (and theology), one may abort fetuses, bomb developing countries, contaminate and despoil the environment, and act in viciously inhumane—or, better, *impious*—ways.

Although editors Davis and Roper illuminate, *via* their introduction and generous,

detailed annotations, the sources of and influences upon Grant's thought, giving proper attention to contemporary philosophers such as Simone Weil (1909–1943) and Leo Strauss (1899–1973), they—and, to be fair, Grant himself—omit one name: the French Jewish philosopher Julien Benda (1867–1956). True: Benda's great polemic, *La Trahison des clercs* (1927), is an attack on the nationalist (really, fascist) inclinations of leading European intellectuals of the inter-war period, while Grant's *Lament* executes an acid defence of nationalism. However, both Grant and Benda believe that the erection of the "universal, homogeneous state" will constitute a profound oppression and diminution of humanity. Thus, *Lament for a Nation* is one more attack on "treasonous" intellectuals.

This possibility creates an intriguing connection between Grant and Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau (1919–2000), an intellectual whose anti-nationalism was so indebted to Benda that he titled one of his most archly provocative articles, "Nouvelle trahison des clercs" (1962). Although Grant opposed Trudeau, they were both from the same generation, enjoyed patrician childhoods, flirted with the Left (while veering occasionally to the Right), became best-selling authors, loved penning polemic, and, perhaps most significantly, cultivated an aloofness to the different publics that offered them adulation. Not only that, they shared some political views (including an admiration for Diefenbaker). When Grant advises Diefenbaker, in 1965, "To compromise the fundamental prerogatives of the national government would mean that Canada would become a series of disconnected regions, rather than a nation," the political philosopher (as he styled himself) sounds downright Trudeauvian.

Of course, Trudeau was able to reshape Canada through laws, but Grant changed English Canada, at least a little and at least temporarily, through the force of his ideas.

His *Lament* generated just enough leftist nationalism to push the Trudeau Government to pursue cultural nationalist goals (which Trudeau preferred to term "pan-Canadianism") and even to attach the adjective *Canadian* to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (a superfluous gesture in a *Canadian* constitution). Although we tend to consider the 1960s–1980s in Canada as a struggle between the federalist Trudeau and Quebec sovereignty champion René Levesque (1922–1987), Grant's voice is also crucial and definitive. His 1960s writings—including screenplays, TV interview transcripts, public and course lectures, book reviews, letters-to-editors, and the books—make it so.

In a time—the Age of Aquarius—when most effective dissenters were "drop-outs" and "radicals," rock stars and drug experimenters, Grant attained this status as a tweedy, professorial Christian. Only one other confessed Christian of his era so managed to transform his society: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968).

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## Found in Translation

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**Claudine Bertrand, ed.; Marie Vautier, Stephen Scobie, trans.**

*Paris Québec*. Ekstasis \$21.95

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Reviewed by Marie-Claude Legault

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*Paris Québec* results from Claudine Bertrand's wonderful idea of collecting poems about Paris from a Québécois perspective. The previously unpublished work of 18 Québécois poets from diverse backgrounds explores the attraction to and influence of Parisian culture over the Québécois imagination. The collection covers a wide range of poetic styles and reactions to the *ville lumière*. An example of this diversity comes across through Lucien Francoeur, who is mostly known for his rock music and his contribution to commercial radio; Raoul Duguay, who is one of

the founders of Infonie (an avant-garde approach to collective performances in Quebec); and Nicole Brossard, who is a double winner of the Governor-General's award for poetry as well as the recipient of the Athanase-David prize (Quebec's highest award for literature). Poems that celebrate a common cultural heritage are often juxtaposed with poems that emphasize a form of alienation and exclusion, such as "being put on display" for sounding different than the Parisian French. While the hereditary bond between the two cultures can be found through the words of Cécile Cloutier ("Paris—time / Paris—stone / Paris—me" from "Paris thinks") and Duguay ("to lose myself in the inviting skirts / of the daughters of my great-great-great-grandmother / who made the vital source of a verb spring from my mouth / twinning forever frenchois and kébécois" from "Kébèk-Lutèce"), the gap between the two cultures is brought up when Louise Blouin mentions how "North America in French / and in stanzas / fascinates" ("June, Place Saint-Sulpice, poetry market") and Denise Boucher reveals that "sometimes people ask me to repeat things / so they can hear again this accent / a song of the Americas" ("Three poems"). The different themes and styles brought up in this collection make this book very accessible to everybody. Bio-bibliographical notes, endnotes, and photographs of Parisian landmarks by Miles Lowry complete the collection.

The translation offers English-speaking Canadian readers a rare glimpse into the Parisian impact on Québécois culture. I have to admit that I was initially sceptical about the potential success of translating Québécois poems into English. However, Stephen Scobie and Marie Vautier's collaborative translation captures the essence of the original poems. In fact, the endnotes provide information about the translating process and why in some cases there is an approximate rather than a literal translation.

For instance, the translators mention that Bernard Pozier's original titles, "Les paris perdus" and "Les paris tenus" ("literally, wagers lost and wagers won,") have been translated as "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained." They have opted for "a slightly different pun, recalling [John] Milton's [famous poems]" to emphasize "the image of 'Paris perdu' in ways which evoke the idea of a lost innocence, an Edenic ideal." The endnotes also contextualize some Parisian and Québécois references that might not be familiar to Anglophone readers. For instance, many lines from Bruno Roy's "With Paris Where We All Belong" allude to the work of another Québécois poet, Anne Hébert. The translators also explain how the same Parisian reference could bring up different associations for Francophone and Anglophone readers. An example of this dual reference is found in Célyne Fortin's "Pruning Paris." The area that is mentioned in the poem (the square between the church of Saint Sulpice and the Mairie of the 6th arrondissement) appeals to Francophone readers because this is where an annual book fair for publishers of French-language poetry takes place. For Anglophone readers, the same area would be associated with the key settings of Djuna Barnes' novel, *Nightwood*. In their translator's notes, Scobie and Vautier mention that "the entire project has been so much *fun*." That sense of pleasure is certainly transmitted to the reader.



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## Figuring Wisdom

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**Jan Zwicky**

*Wisdom & Metaphor*. Gaspereau \$31.95

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Reviewed by Adam Dickinson

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Giorgio Agamben proposes in *Stanzas* that one of the great unquestioned assumptions of Western culture is the acceptance of the scission between poetry and philosophy as natural. So ingrained is this split, Agamben points out, that it was old news even for Plato. Jan Zwicky's *Wisdom & Metaphor* is an attempt to address and question this split not simply as a means of fusing poetry and philosophy but of demonstrating that to love wisdom is also to be wise to the paradoxical tensions alive in poetic apprehensions of the world. A central claim in the book is that metaphorical and analytic ways of making sense respond to different aspects of how things mean and neither must be reduced to systematic procedures for determining truth. One of the problems with analytic philosophy for Zwicky is its assumption that clarity is singular—to be clear is to eliminate ambiguity. By emphasizing the plurality of contexts simultaneously present in thinking metaphorically, and by formally presenting her arguments in resonant relation to an archive of other texts taken from philosophical, mathematical, poetic, musical and other traditions, Zwicky demonstrates that to think clearly, to be wise, is to recognize that “different wholes occupy the same space.”

*Wisdom & Metaphor* is in part an extension of Zwicky's 1992 work *Lyric Philosophy*. In fact, key terms in *Lyric Philosophy* such as “lyric” (an integrative mode of thought stemming from the desire to escape the confines of language) and “domesticity” (being at home with the tension between the objectification of linguistic thinking and lyric wordlessness) also function centrally in *Wisdom & Metaphor*. Moreover, both works are formally constructed in a similar

way—the author's text is aphoristically presented on the left-hand page while the right-hand page collects an archive of one or more excerpts from other authors and artists such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, Simone Weil, Herakleitos, Henri Poincaré, Lao Zi, and Charles Simic. The form of the book enacts the relational dynamic at stake in its content. In an attempt to depart from philosophy “pursued as an unbroken series of arguments,” Zwicky turns to the aphorism and its capacity to evoke resonant connections between divergent contexts: “An aphorism invites its reader to look at things a certain way; a collection of them invites her to see connections for herself.—That is, aphoristic writing cultivates our ability to see-as.”

“Seeing-as” is a pivotal concept in *Wisdom & Metaphor*. Borrowing from Wittgenstein, Zwicky develops the idea as an expression of the moment of sudden insight that characterizes genuine understanding. To experience patterns fitting together and to comprehend a metaphor are both moments of “seeing-as,” and they involve, Zwicky argues, gestalt shifts between perceptions and re-perceptions of a whole. The relational dynamic intrinsic to “seeing-as” is a breaking and a joining; it is an articulation between “is” and “is not,” between the language of distinct objects and that which exceeds language. This attentiveness to paradox, to being at home among the simultaneous expressions of irreducible contexts, is “seen as,” by Zwicky, coterminous with what it means to be wise. Wisdom, she writes, “has to do with the grasp of wholes that occupy the same space, yet are different. This life as opposed to that. (‘Oh, I see now how it is for you!’).”

*Wisdom & Metaphor* is a study of and in resonance. Think of resonance in the musical sense of harmonics and overtones where integrated components may be sympathetically attuned. Through the concept of “seeing as,” Zwicky links metaphorical

understandings to the sudden insights conveyed by geometrical proofs, to the ways in which a laundry basket, a porch, a day strike us in their utter particularity. The experience of this particularity, or “*thisness*,” for Zwicky is “the experience of a distinct thing in such a way that the resonant structure of the world sounds through it.” Attention to resonance, therefore, has a political dimension: it is the necessary acknowledgement that difference inhabits any connection—things are particular and distinct and yet cannot be reduced to a single context of meaning.

The wide-ranging scope of this book is remarkable (we move at once from Pythagorean Theorem to Japanese poetry and beyond). The beautiful design by Gaspereau Press is consistent with the concerns of the text by allowing for large pages with considerable open space—the aphorisms and the borrowed quotations glitter, enacting their own gestalt shifts. In doing so, the practice of philosophical inquiry explored by Zwicky as an exercise in attention is reflected in the attention demanded by each page.

Jan Zwicky is a unique poet and philosopher, and *Wisdom & Metaphor* is an important book. This work has much to offer not just poets and philosophers, but anyone who has struggled with what it means to understand something in the terms of something else.

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## Beyond the *Balagan*

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**Edeet Ravel**

*Ten Thousand Lovers*. McArthur \$14.95

*Look for Me*. Random House \$29.95

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Reviewed by Adrienne Kertzer

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In Edeet Ravel's first novel, *Ten Thousand Lovers*, the narrator Lily begins her story, “A long time ago, when I was twenty, I was involved with a man who was an interrogator.” Like Ravel, Lily was born in Israel, immigrated to Canada as a child, returned

to Israel as a student, and now lives abroad (Lily in England; Ravel in Canada). Still amazed that she fell in love with a man whose profession her pacifist convictions so staunchly opposed, Lily is acutely aware that her grown-up daughter dislikes unhappy endings. Like Lily's daughter, Ravel's readers might anticipate that a novel about the politics of Israel will be gloomy, but Ravel tricks them, narrating what initially adheres to the conventions of comic romance, yet ends in a far darker place. Interspersing her narrative with learned and often comic digressions on the etymology of Hebrew words that in their own way illustrate the tensions of Israeli culture, Ravel refuses to indulge in the melancholy pleasure of dwelling upon the single death in 1977 of Lily's perfect lover, Ami. Instead, in a beautifully written passage of incremental anger, she challenges her readers to imagine how often such deaths occur. Concluding with a meditation upon Genesis 22, she foregrounds the unheeded significance of the angel's interruption of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac: “this thing . . . is the one thing . . . you really can stop doing.”

If, as one character says, Israelis and Palestinians are “all good, in spite of everything,” why is the situation in the Middle East such a mess? Ravel searches for the answer in a comedy that is both etymological and political. Beginning with the linguistic humour of Ami explaining his job and Lily assuming that he must be an accountant since Hebrew uses the same word for “interrogation” and “investigation,” Ravel clearly envisions comedy as providing more than etymological humour. Lily frequently notes that Israelis are ironic, but Ravel wants a comedy that does more than joke nervously as she says that Israelis regularly do, for example, in turning on the television news to see whether they still exist. Comedy offers a way to get beyond the frustration with opportunities wasted that concludes *Ten Thousand Lovers*. It imagines an alternative

to the *balagan*, a Hebrew word that “is usually used indulgently, in a resigned way; sometimes it is applied to the entire political situation.”

According to the official record, Ami, whose name in Hebrew means “my nation,” dies in the line of duty, but Ravel portrays his death as a case of mistaken identity, ironically appropriate given Ami’s criticism of the state’s treatment of Palestinians. In choosing to work for the military, he hopes to moderate its behaviour, but this proves impossible. Ami’s political criticism is prescient; the play he writes in 1977 is initially banned and then ignored for eleven years until a report confirms “that the use of torture by the Shin Bet was widespread.” By 1993, the play has won seven prizes and become part of the standard repertoire.

Despite the growing support of Ami’s point of view, by the time of Ravel’s second novel, *Look for Me*, the political situation has deteriorated, a situation mirrored in the relationship between the narrator Dana, and her husband Daniel. In comparison to *Ten Thousand Lovers*, *Look for Me* is more nuanced in its optimism. Its protagonist, Dana, takes photographs at demonstrations and views Israeli settlers as far more threatening than the Palestinians. When she tells her husband of the difficulties she has entering the territories, he corrects her belief that “things were peaceful for a while.” As the second part of Ravel’s Tel Aviv trilogy (part three is *A Wall of Light*), incorporating characters who appear elsewhere in the trilogy, *Look for Me* depicts the tensions of living with uncertainty, the situation of the state parallel to the relationship of the central characters. Dana is convinced that the husband, who vanished eleven years ago after he was badly burned while on reserve duty, really wants to be found and reunited with her. At the end, she insists that she is still hopeful, but her husband does not return; his reasons have everything to do with politics and miscommunication.

Like Lily, Dana is very attentive to words. To pay her bills, she writes romance novels, and expresses frustration at the rules governing the mandatory sex scenes, in particular the directive to use only words that appear on a pre-approved list. Her husband tells her she expects too much of people, but she disagrees: “If you knew what the characters in my novels expect, that would give you perspective.” Like Dana, Edeet Ravel might insist that in writing comedy, she does not expect too much. She just wants the freedom to use words that allow for the possibility of another kind of story.

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## Covering Geometries

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**Mary Burger, Robert Glöck, Camille Roy, Gail Scott, eds.**

*Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative.* Coach House \$22.95

**Ray Robertson**

*Mental Hygiene: Essays on Writers and Writing.* Insomniac \$21.95

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Reviewed by Tracy Whalen

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The cover choices for both Ray Robertson’s *Mental Hygiene* and the collectively edited *Biting the Error* are semiotically rich, the geometries hinting at the shape of the attitudes within. Robertson’s *Mental Hygiene*, a collection of book reviews that appeared in such publications as the *Toronto Star*, *Quill and Quire*, and the *Globe and Mail*, features a yellow circle/sun (with a brain embossed on it), centred on a white background. This salient centre suggests, visually, some opposition to the decentring post modern project, a visual rhetoric that corresponds with many of Robertson’s guiding philosophies, not least of which is his disdain for those who revel in “anything with the prefix ‘post’ attached.” Aristotle’s dictum that narrative should have “a beginning, middle, and end” holds considerable sway in Robertson’s critiques: a lack of driving story line is, we discover repeatedly, cause for criticism.



From the cover's central sun emanate sharp, sun-like rays, perhaps a visual pun on the author's first name. Ray Robertson, to be sure, is a pulsating presence in the book. (The third of the book's three sections, entitled "Me," includes "An Autobiographical Poetics.") Notably, the cover has a clean look, an appropriate visual rendering, it seems, of Robertson's project in his first section: exposing the detritus of what he (again, repeatedly) calls "McCanLit," Robertson's term for what he perceives to be, among other things, Canada's landscape-heavy, irritatingly self-conscious, stylistically dead, "boring, static fiction about humourless, self-obsessed protagonists." While he never uses the term "McCanLit-ter," the phonetic codicil seems appropriate here. Throughout, one senses the presence of the abject: Morley Callaghan's "clear deliberate prose" is a lauded tool for understanding a "messy" world; Robertson laments the "latest crime/horror/romance schlock that routinely clogs the best-seller lists," like so much hair in a drain; he admires "a well-scrubbed sentence." The term "McCanLit" serves (in the "Part One: Us" section, anyway) as the necessary Other that guides his judgements: Paul Quarrington's *The Spirit Cabinet* merits attention because, unlike so much McCanLit, something happens in it and it is funny; *The Journey Prize Anthology* gets less praise because its subject matter is, like so much Canadian fiction, "of the Domestic Dilemma" sort.

A self-styled contrarian, Robertson has in a sense made it predictable that reviewers (especially university professors) will find his evaluative criteria and explications dissatisfying. If one demands in-depth critique, Robertson's peripatetic poetics may disappoint: terms like "real writer," "serious literature," and "good literature" get little development; evaluative claims about style are supported, often, by example-heavy prose passages without textured explanation. His proclamations at times border on the hyperbolic: a writer, he asserts, must be

"wildly egotistical . . . if their books are to be any good." The modalizing scholar may be taken aback by Robertson's comfort with superlatives, as in "[Martin] Amis is our best living writer-critic" (148). The reviews are generally stronger in his second section, "Them," when he is not as obsessed with the Canadian publishing industry and its readers. And, truly, one hears throughout the book a witty and humorous voice. When all is said and done, one might say of *Mental Hygiene* the very thing Robertson says of Ian Roy's *People Leaving*: his reviews "are like good pop songs: maybe not likely to remain in one's mind for all that long, but well-crafted and enjoyable all the same."

The cover of *Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative*, edited by Mary Burger *et al.*, is also comprised mainly of white background, its foreground consisting of overlapping shapes of different colours, which contain messages like FEEL ALL SICK and COMPLETE ORDER and TIMES YOU WANT TO FORGET. The collection does not pretend to be linear; words such as *fractures, becoming, process, experimental, performance, polyphony*, even *interconstitutionality*, reflect the theoretical *ethos* of this text. Some of the essays in this book originally appeared on a web magazine, *Narrativity*, a joint project between writers in San Francisco and Montreal. The geometries of the cover (which mirror the tangential relations between ideas in the book) reflect its origins in an online world, where connections occur in the slippery space of hyperlinks and the loosely syntagmatic textualities enacted by the click of a mouse. That which is tolerated in virtual practice, however, proves at times frustrating in the (somewhat) more stationary/linear engagement with a book. While the notion of linearity is, as one might expect, complicated here, the at times "riffing" quality of the prose deflects attention from a lack of sustained engagement. One writer anticipates such a criticism, however, claiming there is "an argument to be made

in favour of text that does not ‘arrive,’” that does “not go anywhere.”

So does this collection go anywhere? Whereas Robertson’s energy (on the cover and otherwise) is explosive, the rhetorical energies of this collection seem *implosive*, radiating inward (within the poetic self and within this community of writers). The reader finds among the contributors a tight rhizomic ecosystem of reference: Gail Scott refers to “Bob’s seminal New Narrative workshops”; Kathy Acker tells us a story about “[her] friend, Bob Gluck,” Gluck references Bruce Boone; Renee Gladman refers to Gail Scott, Camille Roy to Kathy Acker and so on. Thus arises the perplexing matter of intended audience—and the significance of the closed and linked shapes on the front cover. The purpose of the book, as outlined by Robert Gluck in his introduction, is to engage with the question of “the relationship between reader and writer,” to “create a public forum to discuss story, fiction, and narration,” and to “jumpstart a community of discourse” that will transform social relations. Yet the narrative theorist/poet may feel like an eavesdropper on ideas that, truth be told, are not new in post modern criticism: one writer asks us, with reference to narrative realism, “Now, do I have to say—how simplistic.” Likely, no. Nor does a theorist/writer need to be told that experimental writing is often marginalized, or that, in the writing process, “there’s narrative that you’re writing, and there’s the narrative your readers make from it.” Some moments delight and surprise, for sure (what it feels like to be a “miso-covered salmon” is a mystery, but a reader might care to speculate), but *Biting the Error* is, ultimately, a strangely loose collection wrought by a tightly knit community.

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## All the Lonely People

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**Douglas Coupland**

*Eleanor Rigby*. Random House \$32.95

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**Hal Niedzviecki**

*The Program*. Knopf Canada \$29.95

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Reviewed by Colin Hill

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Douglas Coupland’s ninth novel, *Eleanor Rigby*, is stylistically conservative and offers a now very familiar ironic and satirical treatment of contemporary life. Even without the innovative leaps that many have come to expect from the author of *Generation X*, *Eleanor Rigby* is immensely funny and memorable. Its central character is Liz Dunn (email address: “eleanorrigby”), an intelligent and independent middle-aged woman who is lonely, overweight, and disillusioned with her monotonous and aimless life. She feels anonymous and invisible as she follows a typical suburban routine and works in a dull office for a boss she calls “The Dwarf To Whom I Report.” The first scenes in the novel take place in 1997 as Liz is taking time away from work and watching sentimental movies while she recovers from dental surgery. A call from a local hospital interrupts her “*verklempt*-o-thon movie festival,” informing her that the son she secretly gave up for adoption in high school is ill. Jeremy, a romantic and eccentric 20-year-old with a drug problem and an ability to sing backwards, enters Liz’s life and infuses it with sudden importance and meaning. Liz is fascinated that Jeremy sees surreal and apocalyptic visions, which are brought on in part by the aggressive strain of multiple sclerosis that is killing him. As Jeremy’s health rapidly deteriorates, he becomes a mattress salesman and exploits his disability to win sympathy, business, and sales awards. The story is narrated in 2004, several years after Jeremy’s death. Liz looks back upon her few months with her dying son, the events that led to his conception during a class trip to Rome, and her occasionally eventful childhood and

adolescence—as a young woman she would break into houses and simply sit in them while their owners were away, and she once found the dead body of a murdered transvestite. In the present, Liz travels to Austria to be questioned by police about a man—Jeremy’s father—arrested for making strange “religious assaults” on women. Liz brings with her on the trip a small “meteorite” she has recently found. It turns out to be radioactive and shuts down a hyper-secure post-9/11 Frankfurt airport. Liz learns she has received a high dose of radiation, and will live out the rest of her life fearing for her health and constantly aware of her mortality.

*Eleanor Rigby*’s most engaging aspect is not its incredible plot but its compelling narrator. Coupland playfully ignores questions of appropriation of voice and creates a quirky, witty, and ironic narrator, who comments frankly on the typical anxieties of single, middle-aged women. Liz lives her life with a morbid sense of detachment: a program on her computer regularly reminds her how long she has left to live according to government statistics. Liz’s world is populated by the sorts of caricatured contemporary people that we find in other Coupland novels—an overbearing and self-centred mother, an unreliable brother with demonic children, gossip and manipulative co-workers. Her confessional narrative entertains by weaving together a hilarious assortment of urban legends. The quest for meaning and understanding of the human condition is thwarted, in typical postmodern fashion, by a world with little sense of community.

Hal Niedzviecki’s third novel, *The Program*, is a philosophical and intensely psychological exploration of contemporary life. Maury Stern is working in an advertising firm when his life enters a period of crisis. Maury’s son, Danny, has been maladjusted since spending a weekend alone with Uncle Cal while a toddler and Maury wants to know why. His search for the missing Cal drives

the plot forward. Niedzviecki weaves between the present and past as lonely and unhappy characters find themselves in situations rarely explored in fiction: a father/son wolf-watching expedition leads to tragedy, a summer camp is run by a “mad Zionist,” and an elderly woman structures her life by her TV-viewing schedule. As Maury searches for his brother, increasingly questing for self-knowledge, he becomes unable to discern the essential things in life as advertising slogans incessantly run through his mind. Maury’s quest parallels the life of his son Danny, who writes a massive computer program that interfuses with his own consciousness as he struggles to come to terms with his own troubled past.

*The Program* is a smart and unconventional book full of ideas, though these tend to be foregrounded too didactically—the four sections are titled “morphology,” “history,” “ontology,” and “humanity.” While Niedzviecki shows an ability to understand and represent human psychology, he fatigues the reader with long, monotonous passages of description and stream-of-consciousness narrative centering on such banal situations as using a photocopier. Niedzviecki’s characters are credible and unusual, but they are universally emotionally stunted and unlikeable. Characterization is refreshingly direct if at times glib and self-consciously hip. Short, fragmentary sentences convey a sense of immediacy but make the prose choppy, mannered, and tedious: “He went to the bathroom. Took a deep breath of urinal air. He looked at himself in the mirror. He felt pale, but his reflection was ruddy and confident. Tan jacket, blue slacks, yellow tie. She had picked the tie out. The tie didn’t go.” Regardless, *The Program* is an ambitious and highly original novel that suggests Niedzviecki is one of Canada’s most sophisticated emerging writers.

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## Challenging Women

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**Linda Griffiths**

*Chronic*. Playwrights Canada P \$15.95

**Sally Clark**

*Wanted*. Talonbooks \$17.95

**Marie Clements**

*The Unnatural and Accidental Women*.

Talonbooks \$16.95

Reviewed by Kirsty Johnston

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Linda Griffiths' *Chronic*, Sally Clark's *Wanted*, and Marie Clements' *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* do not suggest obvious connection in their content. *Chronic* explores a woman's struggles with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS). *Wanted* follows a young woman's difficult journey in the Klondike Rush. Following a "Mixed blood/Native" woman's search for her mother, *The Unnatural and Accidental Women* considers the lives and murders by a serial killer of at least ten women between 1965 and 1987 along Vancouver's East Hastings Street. Although diverse, each play was written by an award-winning, established female playwright and features a complex and resilient female protagonist. Further, despite the tragic and often horrific aspects of the plots, none of the plays is without humour. Perhaps most exciting for theatre practitioners, each poses production challenges.

Jerry Wasserman usefully introduces *Chronic* in the Playwrights Canada Press edition and situates it in Griffiths' oeuvre. Dedicated to "all those with mysterious illnesses . . . everywhere . . .," Griffiths' play follows Petra, a woman diagnosed with CFS, as she confronts the skepticism of her doctor and dot.com company co-workers. The co-workers include a romantic partner who seems disturbingly drawn to her when she is ill, a younger jealous subordinate who both undercuts and emulates her, and a boss who waffles between supporting and firing her as she becomes ill. The Virus, the play's sexiest and vilest character, is the one

with whom Petra has the most intense relationship. For Griffiths, the play's core dynamic is that characters are both repelled and drawn to illness: "They all want to run, but they all end up kissing each other instead."

*Wanted* presents the familiar trope of two brothers of opposite temperaments fighting over a woman. The play complicates the idea of the woman as object, however, and follows the female protagonist as she struggles to survive independently in the inhospitable Klondike environment, a place drawn from Clark's research into those who followed their dreams of gold in 1897 only to meet with starvation, punishing weather, and disease. As Robin Whittaker's introduction to the play suggests, the historical drama has contemporary resonance (including a wealthy character, Bill Gates!) as the Klondike operated on an economy of greed in which bodies, sex, gold, and integrity became commodities. Nowhere is this more evident than in the play-within-the-play in which men are paid to be "hung" in front of a paying crowd.

Even more contemporary in its analysis of human cruelty and violence is Clements' play. Critical of the media's sensationalizing coverage of the serial killer and minimal attention to the lives of the murdered women, the play attempts to redress the imbalance by presenting eleven richly drawn and distinct female characters, all of whom speak about their aspirations and problems. Reclaiming the women's lives from the media's dehumanizing and isolating labels, the play suggests a community of women, connecting them with the past and each other. Although Clements includes murder scenes, the dead women reappear as ghosts, arguing and supporting each other. Poetry, multimedia, inventive staging, and arresting choral works honour the women's lives and seek empowering narratives beyond the victimizing tropes of the media.

Talonbooks' 2005 edition is not the first published version of Clements' text. Earlier

it appeared in *Canadian Theatre Review* (2000), *Staging Coyote's Dream: An Anthology of First Nations Drama in English* (2002), and *Playing the Pacific Province: An Anthology of British Columbia Plays, 1967-2000* (2001). Ginny Ratsoy introduces the play in the latter and includes Clements' account of the play's inspiration, details surrounding associated actual events, and a bibliography. By contrast, the 2005 version presents the play alone. This slimmer, less expensive version is perhaps more practical for production.

Each of the plays poses production challenges. In addition to attending to complicated sound and multimedia aspects, designers for Clements' play must create both a perambulating armchair whose arms hug its occupant and a dresser which taunts, gropes, and physically assaults a character with its opening and closing drawers. Griffiths explains that *Chronic* is "not an easy play to do. It has to be done simply. Rely on your actors, let them find it. You can't take it literally but you still have to use your mind. The dream is the DNA of the piece. It's emotional, don't be too tasteful." Clark, in addition to requiring mock "hangings," demands the following in an early scene: "The special effect one wants to create is five people in a scow being spun around by a whirlpool. Everyone falls out of the scow except for MARY. The scow flies through the air and crashes in the river below—breaking into pieces."

Pushing practitioners to be inventive, facing the complexities of harrowing stories, finding ways to balance the seriousness of their ideas with humour, each of these plays demonstrates the assuredness and technical skills of talented, mid-career playwrights pushing themselves to tell difficult stories which fully exploit the languages of theatre.

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## This Yesterday of Today

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**Nicole Brossard; Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, trans.**

*Yesterday, at the Hotel Clarendon.* Coach House  
\$27.95

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Reviewed by Susan Rudy

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*Yesterday, at the Hotel Clarendon* is Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood's wonderfully attentive and generative translation of Nicole Brossard's *Hier*. Quintessentially Brossard, the novel pulsates with intellectual women reading, writing, remembering, making love, worrying, thinking, talking, pondering. So poetic and so delightfully feminist, the novel left me wishing "hier" were an English word. Oh for a word that means "yesterday" and looks like "here," that nestles a little "i" within the word "her."

Believing "we must be responsible before history, not let it pull us into oblivion," Simone Lambert runs the new Museum of Civilization. Her granddaughter Axelle Carnavale is a geneticist: "Axelle loves her work. . . . In social situations, [she] claims she enjoys reading. She never says that it allows her to stock up on puns that help time go by when she feels like dying." Carla Carlson, a Saskatchewan writer, "speaks a beautiful French" and every two years spends a few months in Quebec City completing her novels.

The narrator works for Simone and meets with Carla most nights at the Hotel Clarendon bar: "[w]hile others march gaily toward madness in order to stay alive in a sterile world," she "strives[s] for preservation." In this Quebec City setting, they meet or recall meeting in bars and hotel rooms, at conferences and over meals, by the sea and on terraces.

Unusually for Brossard, the women's attention is focused not only on each other but also on absent and silent significant others: Simone's deceased lover Alice, her estranged daughter Lorraine, and her grand-

daughter Axelle. (She misses a meeting with Axelle and then meets but doesn't recognize her.) For both the narrator and Carla, the absent other is a deceased mother.

Brossard inscribed my copy of *Hier* with the words "Ce 'hier' d'aujourd'hui." "This yesterday of today," this *Hier*, is inhabited by the lovers, mothers, daughters who are (with) us though they've gone before. "Of today" is their/our speech and conversation:

- Axelle:** It mustn't be easy, being a character.  
**Carla:** No. Character, meaning pretending to be real—  
**Narrator:** —and to suffer, but what for?  
**Axelle:** Suffering for real while pretending to suffer adequately.  
**Carla:** Like an actress, then? But an actress isn't a character. She's often me.

As this passage demonstrates, while ostensibly a "novel," *Yesterday* incorporates passages of theatrical script and philosophizing. The structure is more like an unfolding than a proceeding.

The first section, also called "Yesterday," is the most substantial at 118 pages. The next five sections are much shorter: "The Urns" is ten pages long, "The Hotel Clarendon" 32 pages, "Chapter Five" five pages, "Carla Carlson's Room" 35 pages, and "Some Notes Found in the Room at the Hotel Clarendon" seven pages long. A hauntingly evocative and erotic single-page poem reappears six times.

The end of the novel is not the end because a rather scholarly appendix translates three pages that appear in Latin (a scripted conversation with Descartes!), the sources of quotations, and the names of the 59 French, British, American, Canadian, nineteenth-century, modernist, and contemporary authors—Genet, Woolf, Melville, Bersianik, Cixous, Proust, Aquin, Rilke, Brossard, Bellefeuille, Barnes and many others—whose texts Carla purchases in Quebec because they "make [her] want to write." This book makes you want to read. Read it.

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## Trajectories and Passages

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**Patricia Godbout**

*Traduction littéraire et sociabilité interculturelle au Canada (1950-1960).* Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa \$34.95

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**Simon Harel**

*Les passages obligés de l'écriture migrante.* XYZ \$27.00

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Reviewed by Kathy Mezei

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As Quebec continues to debate its "master-narrative" of sovereignty ("Manifeste pour une approche réaliste de la souveraineté—Pour en finir avec certains sophismes" *Le Devoir*, 11 mai 2006), and the rest of Canada agonizes once again over bilingualism—or the lack of—"Is it harder to become bilingual?", *The Globe and Mail*, 22 May 2006), these two studies offer contrasting perspectives on Quebec's negotiations with its identity and the social discourses and literary representations of inter- and trans-culturalism. While Patricia Godbout firmly grounds her investigation of cultural exchange between French and English Canada in historical documents, Simon Harel, invoking a vast array of modernist and postmodernist thinkers from Walter Benjamin to Donald Woods Winnicott, seeks to revision the discourses surrounding literature in Quebec written by émigrés (and the children of émigrés).

In meticulous detail, Godbout examines the parallel trajectories of two francophone and two anglophone men of letters who initiated contact with the "other" literature and created moments of convergence during the 1950s. Interestingly, the two French-Canadians, Guy Sylvestre and Pierre Daviault, who edited, respectively, *Gants du ciel* (1943-46) and *La Nouvelle revue canadienne* (1951-56), worked as civil servants based in Ottawa, whereas Frank Scott and John Glassco lived in Montreal and the Eastern Townships, and became well-known poets (Scott of course also achieved fame as an academic,

lawyer, and politician). Furthermore, Godbout's research into archival papers, correspondence, and the literary magazines and anthologies of the 1940s and 1950s demonstrates that significant instances of contact were initiated *before* the Quiet Revolution, the explosion of new writing in Quebec and Canada, and the creation of institutional infrastructures such as the Canada Council in the 1960s and 1970s.

Two other noteworthy points concerning intercultural relations between French and English Canada emerge from Godbout's examination of documents. First, anglophones such as Scott were more active in facilitating points of contact than their francophone counterparts—Sylvestre and Daviault were atypical and neither attained the influence or cultural status of Scott or Glassco. Second, Godbout refers to Michael Gnarowski and Louis Dudek's pertinent comment in their *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada* (1967) that there was an almost total absence of relations or influence between writers in the two languages. But, Godbout notes, it is their *attentiveness* to this absence that is of particular significance.

Although Godbout divides the book into four chapters centred on these four men, each chapter incorporates extensive discussion of other—primarily Anglophone—figures who ventured into cultural mediation. Thus, in the chapter on Sylvestre, she not only outlines his commitment to introduce English-Canadian literature to francophone readers in *Gants du ciel*, intended as “un pont autant entre les Canadiens des deux langues qu'entre Canadiens et étrangers,” she also explores his relationship with A.J. M. Smith (both published anthologies of Canadian poetry in their respective languages in 1943), and with A.M. Klein, along with Louis Dudek's efforts to include translations in *First Statement*. Similarly, in “Frank Scott, gentleman traducteur,” Godbout documents and maps Scott's trajectory both as translator and as animator of social gatherings,

recounting an amusing anecdote in which Scott had to post bail for Gaston Miron, Louis Portugais, and Micheline Sainte-Marie who had been caught speeding en route to a meeting at the Scotts. A considerable section is then devoted to the Scottish poet and translator, Gael Turnbull, and his relationship with Raymond Souster, the Contact Press, and his translations of Saint-Denys Garneau, Roland Giguère, Paul-Marie Lapointe, Gilles Hénault.

In her portrayal of Glassco, Godbout skillfully blends the history of his trajectory towards translating Saint-Denys Garneau's poems and journals with an astute interpretation of his translations. She suggests that in contrast to Scott for whom translation was a means of cultural exchange, Glassco perceived the act of translation as a re-writing. Compared to these three engaged figures, Daviault, despite his vital role in teaching translation at the University of Ottawa since 1936 and his defence of the purity of the French language, seems a minor player. Steeped in fascinating archival and historical material, *Traduction littéraire* marks a significant stage in translation and intercultural studies in Canada, a model to emulate.

Simon Harel's densely written and intensely argued study focuses on discourse about cultural pluralism in Quebec in the 1980s and 1990s. After elaborating its manifestation as transculturalism in the literary magazine, *Vice Versa*, founded by a group of Italo-Quebec writers in the 1980s, he then moves to the novels and essays of Naïm Kattan, Régine Robine, Antonio D'Alfonso, and Émile Ollivier. More than half of the book is preoccupied with his assessments and critiques of Quebec's outdated master-narrative of a hegemonic past and obsession with identity, its turn to “l'identitaire” as a response to an increasingly pluralistic society and the ensuing “choc culturel,” and finally of the politically expedient “communautés culturelles.” The latter, by locating, labeling,

and collectivizing ethnicities and emphasizing belonging, frequently resulted in the ghettoization and constraint of the individual. In order to move beyond the limitations inherent in foregrounding dislocation, exile, identity, marginality, and alterity in these articulations of “multiculturalism,” he envisions a more flexible concept of migration to encompass “une écriture en mouvement.” Rather than viewing migrant literature as deterritorialization, Harel invokes the notion of “lieu habité” or “habitabilité,” which does not privilege the place of arrival or the place of departure; more specifically he is interested in the Greek concept of *oikos*, or household, and the implications of inscribing domestic space and of conceptualizing hospitality—or the lack of—for the migrant subject and his/her journey into interiority —“l’écrivain est à la fois un passeur et un sujet incarné.” (Harel has an aptitude for elegant and suggestive phrases.) In the unfolding of the complexities of place in migration, Montreal is continually evoked as urban catalyst.

I found Harel’s extensive elaboration of terms and engagement with other critics unnecessarily drawn out, at times repetitive, and hampered by what he himself describes as “détours théoriques.” Nor is there any gesture to the kinds of cultural exchange explored by Godbout; Harel’s study focuses only on writing from francophonie, and does not therefore profit from the many animated discussions in the rest of Canada on this subject. When, in the last half of the book, Harel attends to specific writers and works and, in particular, when he elucidates their diverse trajectories to and from a “lieu habité,” the book gains coherence and tangibility. Bringing his interest in psychoanalysis to bear on his interpretation of migrant writers and their passages, he points to Kattan’s interrogation of a “habitabilité psychique,” Robine’s reflections on melancholy, nostalgia, breakdown, and the “hors-lieu,” D’Alfonso’s expression of the trauma

of displacement, and Ollivier’s preoccupation with “la maison-mère.” In Harel’s closing analysis of Ollivier, where he deftly interweaves Ollivier’s novels and critical writings with his own ideas on “habitabilité,” theory and literary text merge most cogently.

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## Immigrant Memoirs

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**Stan Persky**

*The Short Version: An ABC Book.* New Star \$24.00

**George Jonas**

*Beethoven’s Mask: Notes on My Life and Times.*

Key Porter \$39.95

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Reviewed by Ralph Sarkonak

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Stan Persky, born in Chicago in 1941, and George Jonas, born in Budapest in 1935, have given us two hybrid works written in short chapters cum fragments. Although autobiographical material is to be found in both books, they are as much commentary—social, political, historical, even literary—as memoirs.

Overtly inspired by Czeslaw Milosz (Nobel Prize for Literature 1980), Persky has based his book on another alphabetical autobiography also written in fragments, *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. There are 50 entries in *The Short Version*; the shortest, “Bald,” is less than a page and the longest, on the poet Robin Blaser, runs over 20 pages. The alphabetical order is strictly followed, even the acknowledgements and the bibliography appear in their “proper” places. There are entries on Adam, AIDS, Woody Allen, and Constantine Cavafy. Persky never gets beyond the letter C, although he promises to continue his introspection in a sequel, which at the present per letter production rate will lead to a multi-volume series. The author is torn between the desire for order, albeit of an arbitrary kind, and an anarchical desire to break out of such self-imposed discipline; for example, the essay on Richard Rorty appears near the end in an entry entitled



"Contingency" for the philosopher's book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, one of Persky's Ur-philosophy guides. There are also lacunae, the most noticeable of which is anti-Semitism, although memories of growing up as an unconfirmed Jew who refused to have a Bar Mitzvah have a prominent place.

The most narrative parts of this *Short Version* take the form of travel literature recounting trips to Athens, Bangkok, Budapest, and a not-so-nostalgic return to Chicago. Here he perfects the art of the anticlimax since many an entry ends not so much with a bang as with an afterthought. There is a "zero degree" to the writing, itself an *hommage* to Roland Barthes' famous title. As with the structure, Persky is resolutely post-structuralist and postmodernist. He is also "post-homosexual," wisely claiming that there is not very much if anything to say about homosex specifically, since "descriptions tend to be either self-indulgent, schoolyard boasting, or pornography," none of which is to be found here. Readers may sometimes feel like asking "What's the point?" but the question ignores the Barthesian paradox that good writing need not have any point at all since it can and often is a pretext to pass the time, produce something, share passing thoughts, and indulge a little in the foibles of memory. Barthes allows Persky to realize that there is a middle ground between poetry and prose, between narrative and theory. At times the writing folds in on its many intertexts becoming a kind of "mimo-text," more *hommage* to his favourite writers than pastiche. Stan Persky, the writer, was born not in Chicago but in a Vancouver gay bar where he noted the ideas and impressions that would become one of his best books, *Buddy's: Meditations on Desire*, also a work of *hommage* to another left-handed writer whose work was anchored in "atheism, homosexuality, bookishness, political radicalism."

Since 1966, Persky has divided his time between Vancouver, where he teaches at

Capilano College, and Berlin. His primary guide to Germany's capital is Walter Benjamin; Isherwood is mentioned, but he does not resonate in Persky's imagination in the same way as the German philosopher and translator of Proust. Guides, friends, mentors, teachers, writers, photographers, pimps, and philosophers have populated Persky's life. He outlines a new Benjamin-inspired book project, *Berlin and the Angel of History*, which will concentrate on cultural history, especially on the importance of homosexuality to the city's past and present. This proposed project reminds one of Benjamin's unfinished but masterly *Arcades Project*, and as such it could be to the Berlin of the twenty-first century what the *Passagenwerk* was to the Paris of the nineteenth century.

Persky likes the "fundamentally social democratic character" of Canada, but he is best at describing other spaces. The chapter entitled "Chicago" is more visceral and less intellectual than other descriptive fragments, and it comes complete with the necessary reflections on memory's tricks and gifts. *The Short Version*, an alphabet soup of recollections and musings, is a reading of books, cities, and memories imbued with an appreciation for poetry and ethics that grounds it in some of the most pertinent themes and writing practices of the twentieth century.

If by temperament, choice, and practice, Persky is a postmodernist, George Jonas remains resolutely attached to the tradition of high modernism, including that combination of moral seriousness and ironic detachment that will frustrate and confuse many of today's younger readers. *Beethoven's Mask* (named for a drawing of the composer's death mask done on 11 September 1920 by the writer's mother) gives us a more or less chronological outline of the writer's life, interspersed with meditations on Europe's fall from grace and superiority after World War I. Nazism, the Holocaust, and Communism are never far from Jonas' mind—not

surprising for someone whose sense of Jewishness came about the day his mother had to sew a yellow star on his coat. Unlike Persky, this neo-Canadian seems somewhat less well “adapted” to the new country, despite all his career successes (including a 35-year stint at the CBC, and a career in journalism) his writing remains rooted in European history and values. Jonas cannot forget that the heart of darkness was located not elsewhere but in the continent that stood for the “pinnacle of human achievement, in matters spiritual as well as temporal.”

*Beethoven's Mask* is also comic, as we see in Jonas' recollections of adolescent sexuality and his sarcastic portrayal of the CBC, “born of a marriage between show business and the Post Office.” Chapters such as “Trains with whipcream” and “A tale of two functionaries” are truly classic and could figure in any anthology of Canadian humour (a strong debt to Stephen Leacock informs and inspires Jonas in his lighter moments). Jonas' best comic achievement is his hilarious description of an uncle pushing one hand into a Turkish singer's abdominal muscle as Fatima sings “Stride la vampa.” But even this chapter ends on a sinister note, “The Gestapo had found other uses for piano wire.”

Jonas' writing on the persecution of European Jews reflects his personal experiences as a secular Jew in Budapest during World War II. This narrative raises many an ethical question and muddles today's certitudes; his family is saved by an anti-Semite. But despite anchoring his own narrative in specific places and times, Jonas does not believe that modern anti-Semitism was peculiar to Germany, in which of course he is right. In “Why Germany?”, Jonas sets out a closely and well reasoned essay on historical contingency: “It is the human race that is genocidal, not the Germans. . . . In one vital sense we are all Jews and we are all Germans potentially, depending on the conditions in which we find ourselves.” He is equally lucid on Communism, “this

century's deadliest tyranny that was the scourge of one-fifth of the world and a grave threat to the rest.”

Jonas has no time for fools, especially fellow Western travellers and government-paid ones, whether in the education establishment or such state-run bureaucracies as the CBC. Hence his biting irony, dead-on aphorisms, and trenchant definitions. Often his writing shows a Swiftian sarcasm and pleasure in assigning to print politically incorrect truths: “The worst effect of compulsory universal education was that it educated people beyond their intellectual means”; “The women of defeated nations flower”; “Since the 1960s, Canada has tried to achieve moral leadership in the world by observing strict neutrality between good and evil.” Jonas is a memoirist wearing—and announcing—the mask of a satirist; indeed, one of the best chapters reads like a philosophical essay by a twentieth-century Diderot as Jonas reconstitutes a distant political dialogue in “My Zionist Uncle.”

Canada is home to these two exiled writers, but their new country, never entirely absent, remains a bland backdrop to the cultural arenas and killing fields of Europe in the last century—the two essential touchstones informing these two very different writings.

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## Et pourtant, elles écrivent

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**Patricia Smart**

*Écrire dans la maison du père. L'émergence du féminin dans la tradition littéraire du Québec. XYZ*  
20,00 \$

**Isabelle Boisclair**

*Ouvrir la voie/x. Le processus constitutif d'un sous-champ littéraire féministe au Québec (1960-1990).*  
Nota bene 25,95 \$

Compte rendu par Lori Saint-Martin

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Deux ouvrages très différents : le premier, une réédition d'un texte devenu classique, qui propose une lecture d'ensemble de la littérature québécoise sous l'angle du

féminin; le second, une étude des rapports entre les femmes et l'institution littéraire au Québec, que ce soit au sein des instances dominantes ou d'un sous-champ féministe que quelques pionnières ont progressivement mis en place.

Paru en 1988, *Écrire dans la maison du père* remporte le prix du Gouverneur général l'année suivante, suscite un concert d'éloges et devient rapidement une référence. Dans la mouvance de certaines théoriciennes françaises et belges, notamment Luce Irigaray et Claire Lejeune, et en continuité avec les travaux des Américaines, dont Sandra Gilbert et Susan Gubar (*The Madwoman in the Attic*, 1979, sur les métaphores liées à l'acte d'écrire), Rachel Blau DuPlessis (*Writing Beyond the Ending*, 1985, sur les structures narratives) ou encore de Naomi Schor (*Breaking the Chain*, 1985, sur le féminin dans le réalisme français), l'étude de Patricia Smart relit en parallèle des textes représentatifs, autant masculins que féminins, de Laure Conan à France Théoret et du roman de la terre à Hubert Aquin. Sa thèse pourrait presque se résumer à cette épigraphe de Claire Lejeune : « Le triangle de la famille patriarcale explose lorsque la quatrième personne du singulier refuse de s'hystériser au Nom du Père et du Fils. Le rideau pourpre du grand théâtre classique flambe lorsque la fille faisant feu du contrat se réapproprie son corps pour l'habiter elle-même avant d'y accueillir un homme et un enfant. » Autrement dit, sous les fondations de la Maison du Père—à la fois demeure réelle, image d'une culture patriarcale misogyne et métaphore de la forme littéraire elle-même avec ses « visées de saisie totalisante du réel »—se tapit un cadavre, celui de la Mère symbolique sacrifiée sur l'autel du pouvoir patriarcal. Se forme maintenant un triangle composé du Père, du Fils qui prétend vainement le remplacer et de la Fille réduite à l'état d'objet d'échange entre hommes et dont la complaisance muette soutient l'édifice. Contraste saisissant donc

entre le trajet du « fils détruit » par le père et celui de la « fille rebelle » qui cherche à prendre la parole et à instaurer de nouvelles valeurs. C'est donc du côté du féminin que viendra l'espoir, alors que les hommes peuvent aspirer tout au plus à une lucidité amère au sujet de l'impasse dans laquelle ils ont engagé la culture; ils se laissent dévorer par une rage qui les pousse au viol et au meurtre de leur compagne, puis dans certains cas au suicide.

Près de vingt ans après sa première publication, l'ouvrage de Patricia Smart soutient magnifiquement la relecture. Finesse et souplesse des lectures, cohérence du cadre d'ensemble, sensibilité littéraire aiguë, langue déliée et élégante—tout est là. Les jeunes auteur(e)s ont peut-être su échapper à l'abîme décrit dans cette étude, mais celle-ci rend admirablement compte d'un grand nombre de textes classiques. Le modèle proposé a le mérite d'intégrer les quatre membres de la famille (alors que les études nationalistes du corpus québécois font totalement abstraction de la fille), celui de lire en parallèle des auteurs masculins et féminins, entreprise alors peu fréquente, et celui de proposer une issue—la réconciliation entre les hommes et les femmes—au lieu de simplement constater l'impasse. Voilà le premier ouvrage, après les travaux de quelques pionnières—Maïr Verthuy, Mary Jean Green, Barbara Godard, Suzanne Lamy—à proposer une métaphore saisissante pour rendre compte de la littérature québécoise dans sa totalité. Un seul regret, qui n'enlève rien au livre lui-même : qu'il soit si peu cité par les critiques hommes montre le peu de cas qu'on fait en général de la lecture féministe.

Sujet qui se trouve justement au cœur de l'ouvrage d'Isabelle Boisclair : la nécessité, pour les femmes, de se donner leurs propres structures de légitimation littéraire. Grâce à une recherche minutieuse, Isabelle Boisclair montre la difficile émergence de la production littéraire des femmes : « lentement mais sûrement » entre 1900 et 1922, puis plus

massivement et avec plus d'audace dans les années 1920 et jusqu'en 1947. Suit le recul des années cinquante, puis l'essor progressif, dès les années 1960, de textes plus ouvertement féministes. À compter des années soixante-dix, un sous-champ propre se constitue, avec ses éditrices et ses librairies féministes, puis apparaît une critique au féminin en réaction à une critique « générale » souvent misogyne ou portée à passer sous silence la production des femmes.

Quiconque cherche à savoir, à titre d'exemple, combien de femmes ont publié au Québec et à quel moment, quels genres les écrivaines ont privilégiés, à quel moment est parue la première thèse sur l'écriture des femmes québécoises ou si les femmes qui écrivent sont bien représentées dans les manuels scolaires—et ce sont des questions indispensables pour l'histoire de la littérature québécoise, pour l'enseignement et pour l'histoire des femmes—trouvera les réponses, accompagnées de réflexions tonifiantes, dans cet ouvrage de référence important. Lire, écrire, publier, recenser : les deux ouvrages dont il est ici question nous donnent chacun à sa manière une précieuse lecture d'ensemble de la littérature québécoise.

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## Rock, Paper, Histories

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**Don McKay**

*Deactivated West 100.* Gaspereau \$25.95

**Lawrence Buell**

*The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination.* Blackwell \$22.95

**Patricia Lockhart Fleming, Gilles Gallichan, and Yvan Lamonde, eds.**

*History of the Book in Canada, Volume One: Beginnings to 1840.* U of Toronto P \$75.00

Reviewed by Travis V. Mason

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If *Vis à Vis: Field Notes on Poetry & Wilderness* helped establish Don McKay, somewhat ironically, as a “nature poet” and “bird

poet,” *Deactivated West 100* should add “geopoet” to his repertoire. From the opening line of “Otherwise than Place”—“I keep rubbing a stone in my pocket”—to its longest section, “Between Rock and Stone: A Geopoetic Alphabet,” McKay turns his poetic attention to the moving earth beneath us. Glaciation, basalt, quartz, saxifrage, and varves each have their place alongside Xenophanes, Heidegger, Margaret Avison, dark-eyed juncos, and black bears. If I were looking for a primary focus here, I could do worse than the space between rock and stone: “rock is as old as the earth is; stone is only as old as humanity.” Stone is domesticated rock, rock made graspable, sometimes literally.

McKay's fascination with rock and stone, with geologic time—the “supreme stretch test” of the imagination—has been nurtured by his walks around southwestern Vancouver Island. His walks are most fully realized in the collection's two poems—“Waiting for Shay,” a brief lyric elegy about the Shay locomotive, and “Five Ways to Lose Your Way,” a long poem chronicling the poet's experiences and observations off the main trail, making a strong argument for gaining something from being lost—and final two essays. In “Approaching the Clearing,” McKay begins with a claim for “the clearing [as] the wild ancestor of [the] room of one's own,” introduces the imaginative act of “cabinning”—the act of imagining where you would build a cabin while resting in a clearing—and includes an extended meditation on the realities of logging. These essays are hardly what one would classify as conventional nature writing, though. Just when you think you've caught McKay in a moment of colonial sentimentality, there he is, a paragraph later, standing self-consciously “in a clearing that was completely [his], holding the suddenly dead off-centre weight of a Homelite XL130.” If you feel something like astonishment when one moment snaps violently into another, hold on for another moment; if you recognize it

as astonishment—"that wide-mouthed silence which we occupy, which occupies us as we turn to the immeasurable life of stone"—well, perhaps you're ready to walk with Don McKay. With *Deactivated West 100*, McKay continues to develop a way of thinking—which is also walking and listening and writing—that differs significantly from others writing about humans' place in the natural world.

Lawrence Buell, too, attempts to make readers aware of the earth's importance, biologically and theoretically, albeit in a more academically rigorous way. Following *The Environmental Imagination and Writing for an Endangered World*, *The Future of Environmental Criticism* concludes a trilogy dedicated to ecocriticism and traces a recent history of environmental criticism by offering "a concise, accessible road map of trends, emphases, and controversies within green literary studies." Buell chooses "environmental criticism" for his title instead of "ecocriticism" because the former, he claims, captures more of the topic's hybridity and the "interdisciplinary mix of literature-and-environment studies" which have tended to focus more on cultural studies than on the life sciences. He also chooses it for marketing reasons, it seems, since "ecocriticism" tends to invoke cartoon images of hippy, tree-hugging, "intellectually shallow nature worshipers," and Buell would rather avoid that association. Make no mistake, though: this is a book about the field—what Buell calls "a concourse of discrepant practices"—of ecocriticism, and Buell does little to hide his fealty to the term.

Divided into five chapters, the book also includes a useful glossary and notes. "The Emergence of Environmental Criticism" operates as a concise introduction to the collection and to ecocriticism. Here Buell elucidates on first-wave and second-wave ecocriticism: first-wave basically marks a distinction between nature and culture and conflates environment with nature rather

than considering the ways humans and human culture are environmental and natural; second-wave widens the canon to address extended concerns (including urban issues, environmental justice, and ecofeminism). "The World, the Text, and the Ecocritic" examines some of "the disparate ways that literary texts evoke and particularize fictive environmentality."

"Space, Place, and Imagination from Local to Global" worries "the inevitable but uncertain shifting relation between being and physical context." "The Ethics and Politics of Environmental Criticism" explores ecocriticism's activist role. And "Environmental Criticism's Future" looks ahead at four challenges ecocriticism faces in the future. Despite its title, though, this book is four-fifths a *history* of ecocriticism.

The massive *History of the Book in Canada* marks a decidedly more ambitious project than Buell's trilogy. *Volume One: Beginnings to 1840* is an impressive mix of encyclopedic research and relevant case studies by a team of historians, literary scholars, and librarians. (In the section that covers "Print and Authority," for example, Gilles Gallichan's entry about political censorship precedes George L. Parker's case study, "Joseph Howe and Freedom of the Press.") Obviously, the limited space of a review cannot begin to do justice to a project as comprehensive as this one. The editors and contributors have found an adequate middle ground between the encyclopedia genre and readable scholarly prose. Most sections are brief enough to encourage the non-book-historian to remain interested, but this is not a book to read cover to cover. This is a reference book that, despite its obvious research and recovery project, is as much about the *future* of a discipline as it is about this country's book *history*.

Overall, the volume strikes me as unnecessarily earnest in its attempt to produce an authoritative resource for the study of book and print culture. They needn't have tried

so hard to convince readers that, for example, reading and its concomitant entities—printing offices, bookstores, reading rooms, libraries—were “socio-cultural agents” that influenced Canada and Canadians as much as books have. But this is a minor quibble. I find the volume chiefly interesting for the importance it affords to materials published *before* the book proper became a common item in what is now Canada: rock paintings and totem poles (examples of First Nations peoples’ “six main expressions of cultural transmission”); almanacs; newspapers; religious tracts; woodcuts. This is an important beginning that shows how the *future* of the book lies in its past.

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## Quest for Family

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**André Alexis**

*Ingrid and the Wolf*. Tundra \$12.99

**Polly Horvath**

*The Vacation*. Groundwood \$12.99

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Reviewed by Sarika P. Bose

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André Alexis and Polly Horvath both write coming-of-age stories suitable for children over ten years. In these open-ended narratives, the protagonists undertake challenging journeys during which they face unexpected, often bizarre encounters with relatives.

Alexis’ novel, *Ingrid and the Wolf*, is a quest narrative with an intriguing premise, and includes fairy tale elements. The ordinary young protagonist who discovers that she is of noble birth and that she has unusual powers is a standard character in children’s fairy tale and fantasy. The awakening of those powers in a setting that evokes the past is also a common device, and the contrast between the mundane setting of the child’s usual world and the fantasy world has been used by many authors, from C.S. Lewis to Susan Cooper, to suggest the existence of a world that is more heroic and that allows the child to reach his or her full potential.

The frame of modern life in Toronto greatly contrasts with the pseudo-medieval culture of the remote Hungarian community to which Ingrid travels. Ingrid and her parents’ immigrant experience appears to be the focus at first, but attention soon shifts to the mysterious and magical world of their past. Her parents’ initial resistance to Ingrid’s journey to their homeland of Hungary has, perhaps, an unexpected source; it is not political unease, but a deeper unease connected with heredity and the supernatural. Ingrid does travel to Hungary at the command of her imperious grandmother, where, as her parents had predicted, she is made to undergo symbolic tests that affirm her nobility and her identity as a member of the family. Her tests follow the triadic patterns common to fairy tale and myth. When she discovers the family secret of the supernatural wolf, Gabor, Ingrid’s ability to speak to him suggests unusual powers and great potential. Unlike generations of the noble Balazs family, she honours her promises to him, and rescues him from the labyrinth in which he has resided for centuries. Though her action disrupts the family traditions, her courage and sense of honour are presented as admirable.

However, once Ingrid’s double quest to find her roots and to prove her abilities is successfully completed, the novel seems to lose direction. She returns to Toronto with the supernatural wolf, whose power, unpredictability, and wild wisdom are confined within a young urban girl’s mundane routine of school and homework. Her journey has given Ingrid new experiences and some new confidence, yet the purpose of bringing the wolf back seems unclear. There are no significant battles to be won in Toronto, and her new-found ability to converse with wolves does not help her reach any particular potential. In fact, Gabor loses his immortality when he leaves the Balazs home, and is reduced to an unusual pet who causes Ingrid some embarrassment

and inconvenience, and who occasionally intimidates unpleasant schoolmates for no real purpose.

Polly Horvath's novel, *The Vacation*, follows the rambling journey undertaken by the young, anxiety-prone narrator, Henry, who longs for a stable home and parents. Henry's parents go on a trip to Africa, leaving him with his eccentric aunts, Mag and Pigg, who force him to accompany them on a directionless road trip through America, when he would rather play baseball with his friends over the summer. Henry has some adventures, which range from being lost in a swamp to meeting strangely cold relatives who live in a house with turrets; these teach him useful lessons about self-sufficiency and family relationships. However, his anxieties are exacerbated by his parents' behaviour in Africa, as his mother vanishes and his parents' marriage seems to be breaking up. Even when his parents return, their reconciliation is fragile, and their attitude toward Henry seems as curiously casual as his aunts' attitudes toward him. Henry's place within his family appears precarious. The self-centred unpleasantness of many of the adult characters underscores the atmosphere of uncertainty and powerlessness in Henry's life. With an endless, dull journey taken with bickering adults as his one certainty, Henry, by the end of the novel, can only adopt an attitude of resigned acceptance and try to become better adapted to his situation.

Both these journey narratives employ some imaginative episodes, but these are eventually made secondary to dull routine, and their lasting significance for the protagonists is left to the imagination of the reader.



## Books of Secrets

**James Grainger and Nancy Lee, eds.**

*The Journey Prize Stories: From the Best of Canada's New Writers.* McClelland & Stewart \$17.99

**M.G. Vassanji**

*When She Was Queen: Stories.* Doubleday \$29.95

Reviewed by Dorothy F. Lane

These two recent books of short fiction present readers with a kaleidoscopic view of Canadian writing, and indeed of Canada itself. Each underscores the role of secrecy in establishing and maintaining relationships, along with the negative ability of secrets to poison both environments and individuals. *The Journey Prize Stories* is a selection of stories from literary journals throughout the country chosen by their editors as "the most exciting writing in English they have published in the previous year." By its very character, then, the anthology is diverse and somewhat uneven, though Grainger and Lee have endeavoured—through their critical introduction—to extract threads that unite the volume as a whole. *When She Was Queen* is M.G. Vassanji's second work of short fiction—after *Uhuru Street* (1991)—and interweaves characters, places, cultures, and generations in intriguing and often disturbing ways, in stories that are distinct and yet intricately linked.

Grainger and Lee begin their introduction by explicitly identifying criteria they employed in selecting 14 stories from over 80 submissions. At the top of their list is the demonstration of the "strongest instincts and best narrative choices" and "emotional and psychological realism." Since some of the stories focus on the experiences of childhood, Grainger and Lee describe children as "intensely curious, narcissistic, and experimental" and as providing "raw, dramatic examples of human psychology in action." These categorical statements about the nature of writing, of humanity, and

even of “Canadian English” are somewhat disconcerting. A clearer sense of why these particular stories were chosen for the volume is helpful; however, the assumptions are questionable and seem overly self-conscious.

The recurring note sounded by these stories is illusion, distress, and underlying power dynamics, especially within families and romantic or sexual relationships; Matt Shaw’s “Matchbox for Mother’s Hair” and Craig Davidson’s “Failure to Thrive” are particularly disturbing. Both these stories focus on abuse of the powerless: Shaw describes the sexual assaults on a mentally challenged boy by his mother’s friends, as well as physical abuse by his own mother; Davidson’s narrator dabbles in the world of hard-core pornography as he works with the disabled and elderly “inmates” of an institution. In both cases, the perspective of the narrator contributes to the ambiguity of the narrative and its conclusion; consequences appear horrifying, but are ultimately left to the reader’s interpretation. In these stories—along with “A Matter of Firsts” (Krista Bridge), “Brighter Thread” (McKinley M. Hellenes), and “Green-Eyed Beans” (Catherine Kidd)—relationships between men and women, and generations of women, appear distorted and painful. In many cases, the misogynist and grotesque elements in perceptions of physical bodies are quite troubling. Even Neil Smith’s “Scrapbook,” which intertwines associations with a campus killing, suggests the difficulty of men and women interacting outside socially defined roles. Yet, this story, along with Pasha Malla’s “The Past Composed,” is evocative and moving in its exploration of trauma and grief. Randy Boyagoda’s “Rice and Curry Yacht Club” is a deeply ironic examination of cross-cultural and cross-generational tensions, again unmasking family secrets. Some others, however, such as Richard Simas’ “Anthropologies,” do not appear to penetrate stereotypes of male and

female characters, even while suggesting the complexity of relationships.

The fiction collected in Vassanji’s *When She Was Queen* demonstrates underlying principles of storytelling and Canadian writing without making explicit or self-conscious statements; Vassanji provides no explanation or introduction. Characters journey through the geographical and political spaces of India, East Africa, and Canada—as well as through particular generational and historical periods. Each opening draws the reader into the narrative and the primary character’s perspective, and each conclusion presents a disclosure that alters the fundamental assumptions of the opening. Vassanji skilfully draws connections between seemingly disparate events and people, fashioning a central mystery or dilemma that both the characters and reader must unravel.

In the title story, the narrator begins by stating simply, “My father lost my mother one evening in a final round of gambling at the poker table.” The central mystery is the significance of that evening and the paternity of the narrator. Interweaving allusions to Hinduism, East Africa, popular culture, British norms, and Indian epics, Vassanji reflects on cultural and social translations of people, relationships, and events. In the second story, “The Girl on the Bicycle,” the central mystery is the action of a woman who spits at a corpse lying in state in the Main Mosque in Toronto; again, in unravelling this mystery, the story takes us back to Tanzania, where the woman was the “only woman cyclist.” Often, as in “The Sky to Stop Us,” recollection of the past alters the characters’ behaviour and relationships in the present.

Many of Vassanji’s stories reflect on the impact of partitions—of India in 1947, and of East Africa in the 1970s—upon personal and familial relationships. The stories are often polyphonal, incorporating several generational voices—as in “Dear Khatija”—through letters, reflections, and dialogue.



Characters, forced to negotiate several worlds, are often—as in “The Expected One”—depicted as both outsiders and insiders. This latest collection thus displays sensitivity, subtlety, and ambivalence in its intriguing and empathetic exploration of secrets. Although many of the stories are told by first person narrators in similar situations, Vassanji displays an extraordinary ability to create distinctive voices and perspectives that never lose their potency.

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## Telling More, Tel Aviv

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**Edeet Ravel**

*A Wall of Light*. Random House \$ 32.95

Reviewed by Andrew Bartlett

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Three voices organize the final novel in Edeet Ravel's Tel Aviv trilogy. Anna, the grandmother of Noah and mother of Kostya and Sonya, writes unanswered letters in 1957; Noah, son of Kostya and Iris Nissan, composes a diary from 1980 to 1992; Sonya, second daughter of Anna, born 27 years after Kostya, tells us about one day in her life.

Sonya has suffered two “disasters”: a medical accident at 13 that left her deaf, and a sexual assault at 19 that made the newspapers. But she is no victim. Her photographic memory, mathematical genius, and protective family contribute to her optimism. One of the strengths of Ravel's work is her rejection of the victimary. The novel lends its attention to the energies of sex, pleasure, friendship, family, work, and learning; Ravel never thoughtlessly attends to claims to victimhood as if they could be assimilated to truth claims. Sonya's day-journey shapes itself into a quest in which she travels from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, pursuing a Palestinian Arab whom she has decided she loves. She negotiates past language barriers (Hebrew, Arabic, sign-language) and gets beyond military barriers—including two of those terrible territorializing walls certainly not made of light. It is a day of irreversible “firsts”:

her first kiss, first love-making, first identification of her (biological) father.

After each of Sonya's segments comes a diary entry by Noah, her nephew (three years her senior) who grows up as her brother. The first is dated on his tenth birthday, the last on Christmas day 1992; he is by then a student of design in Berlin. The adolescent Noah is preoccupied with friends, girlfriends, erotic adventures, and his parents' bitter quarreling. (Kostya is a family man, Iris a careerist.) By analogy and contrast, Noah's diary deepens Sonya's accounts of herself. When, for example, her self-assurance risks arousing our resentment—with a jarring ease she categorizes as “my lover” and “my father” the men upon whom she seizes—Noah presents Sonya as a little girl following him around or a creature traumatized by disability. Similarly, the isolated consumerism and political passivity to which Kostya and Sonya in 2005 seem resigned clash with the ascetic activism represented in Noah's descriptions of his mother. A pro-Palestinian lawyer who defends the helpless and fearlessly attacks the powerful and corrupt, Iris is assassinated in January 1989.

A letter written by the grandmother Anna during her first year in Israel follows each of the grandson's diary entries. An actress, Anna flees Russia via Vienna, leaving behind the married man who fathered Kostya. She never feels at ease in Israel, but through her, we see Kostya, later to become the strong paternal centre of the family, as a spirited and promising boy. Ravel sets Anna's private unhappiness against the public spirit of the still-young and zestfully socialistic Israeli society of 1957. Anna joins a ragtag outfit of theatre enthusiasts who mount a successful production of *As You Like It* on next-to-no resources.

*A Wall of Light* is a novel with staying power: it repays study with wonder. Its power derives not so much from the plausibility and interest of each speaker considered alone as from the resonant play of the voices

against each other. We might find the adult Sonya unpleasantly brazen were it not for Noah's hilarious reports of the odd child Sonya; we might find the single mother Anna maudlin were it not for the knowledge her loneliness will purchase the adult Kostya's inner strength. Listening to the stories of this eccentric family, we marvel at the expenditures of care and luck required to keep a family going day-to-day, let alone lasting through decades. And despite the firsts in Sonya's epic, exuberant day, a melancholy suffuses the text: the structure that deepens also divides. Much of Kostya and Sonya remains unknown to Anna; much of Noah remains unknown to Sonya; even Sonya and Kostya, the closest, are separating. Voices, persons, lives, even when bound by love, paradoxically call forth the construction of walls. The wall of light for which Sonya wishes must ever be only that—the object of a wish.

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## Unstable Boundaries

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**Julie Cruikshank**

*Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, & Social Imagination.* UBC Press  
\$29.95

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Reviewed by Jen Hill

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How do our perceptions of landscapes reveal or shape our understandings of our cultures and ourselves? How might the material grounds of cultural encounter be extended to include the literal ground on which it occurs? To put it another way, to what extent might stories and descriptions of the place in which encounter occurs enable us to more fully understand both encounter and its after-effects? These questions underlie Julie Cruikshank's examination of the glaciers of the St. Elias mountains and their role in the local and international imagination, past and present.

*Do Glaciers Listen?* is a welcome interdisciplinary contribution to recent scholarship

that seeks to account for the complex dynamics of colonial encounter and its aftermaths, as well as to scholarship that insists on troubling the nature/culture divide. Postcolonial scholars working in fields as various as anthropology, geography, literature, and history have complicated our understanding of the sociopolitics of encounter as a moment of totalizing, hegemonic cultural dominance by Europeans, revealing it to be instead a more nuanced, difficult, and variable space and moment of encounter. Cruikshank makes visible material and cultural circumstances surrounding encounter that make more complex the British and American record while asserting a literal materiality—that of the land. The aftermath of encounter thus is not only about whose story and culture triumphs but also about how narratives structure our relation to and understanding of the physical world.

When post-encounter European accounts of landscape superseded native accounts, scientific and travel discourses then became the primary means of understanding northwestern geography. Aboriginal narratives in both their content and their potentially unstable orality convey the fissured, multiple, and unpredictable nature of encounter, as well as the similarly fissured, multiple, and unpredictable nature of the land. To the Indigenous peoples of the St. Elias mountains, glaciers are “permeable boundaries” between the human and the more static landscape. They are living, moving structures understood to have senses of smell, taste, and hearing, as well as volition and agency. Cruikshank cautions us, however, not to value native accounts either as “truth” or as historically fixed, there to be “discovered” by the explorer or for that matter the scholar. Instead, their narratives of sentient glaciers reveal that “humans and nature mutually make and maintain the habitable world,” an argument that anticipates recent methodology in

environmental history and geography and reinforces not only Cruikshank's conclusions but the importance of her claims.

While she is careful to caution us against reducing glaciers to either scientific data or metaphor, glaciers provide in their unpredictability, changeability, complexity, and forcefulness a model for the kind of history Cruikshank practises. Cruikshank crafts her argument with careful attention to the politics of representation, no easy task when working with oral testimony or discussing the difficulties of representing nature. The book consists of three main parts: Aboriginal oral accounts of glaciers, an examination of western European and US exploration accounts, and finally a critical examination of the glacier as US/Canadian border and the role of mapping in a nationalist context. The early chapter "Matters of Locality" provides a history of the Gulf of Alaska region that juxtaposes European historical accounts with Europe's own "Little Ice Age" and Tlingit histories. Discussion of accounts by Kitty Smith, Annie Ned, and Angela Sidney enable Cruikshank to examine the nature/culture relationship, looking at glaciers as social spaces. Smith's, Ned's, and Sidney's oral accounts follow as evidence of the constitutive connection between culture and nature. The second half of the book focuses on two hundred years of mapping and exploration practices of Europeans, with discussion of John Muir and Edward James Glave, and their representation of European mastery of "wilderness" to a metropolitan readership, as well as examination of the boundary survey reports and commissions that determined the US-Canadian border.

In her discussion of the St. Elias glaciers, Cruikshank conveys a persuasive argument for linking local and international histories, "nature" and the social, and the present to the past, using a methodology that rejects the consumer/commodity and subject/object logic of socioeconomics, the "objective" vocabulary of science, and the

European/Other divide present in imperial histories. Her method as well as her claims endorse a polyvocality threatened by globalization and an appreciation of the importance of a landscape threatened by a changing global climate. In the linked world of representation and nature examined in this text, a threat to one is a threat to the other.

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## Modern Takes on What Makes Us Human

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**Suzanne Buffam**

*Past Imperfect*. Anansi P \$16.95

**Karen Solie**

*Modern and Normal*. Brick Books \$17.00

Reviewed by Gillian Jerome

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The act of reading these books by Karen Solie and Suzanne Buffam feels historical. In the early 1970s, critics eventually caught up with the enormous talent of The Great Atwood and The Great MacEwen in-the-making. Let it be said here that the poetry of Solie and Buffam deserves great national and international attention. This perspective escapes flattery by fact: in 2002, Solie's first book, *Short-Haul Engine*, won the Dorothy Livesay Canadian Poetry Prize and was nominated for the Griffin Poetry Prize and Gerald Lampert Award; Suzanne Buffam just accepted in June 2006 the Gerald Lampert Award for *Past Imperfect*. Both authors have been published throughout North America and abroad.

Critics have so far compared Buffam's work most often to the work of Emily Dickinson, the beloved and mythic American recluse, celebrated for the packets of poems she wrote in relative anonymity, a delightful irony considering her role in what we now call the first American Renaissance. This is an easy comparison since the book's only epigraph and its title derive from "Their Height in Heaven comforts not," poem 696, and yet it's true that the book's epigraph—Dickinson's short line of iambic tetrameter

with its customary dashes, “Twas best imperfect—as it was—” —suits this book stylistically for its economy of the lyric and use of the dash as well as thematically as they share preoccupations with belief, failure, acceptance, loneliness and love.

Both books are unique to this generation of Canadian poetry in that craft isn’t served as artifice but as philosophical discourse that seeks to defamiliarize everyday moments of modern life in common idiom: the results produce demonstrations of understated wisdom, great intelligence and talent, and yet of course each poet’s persona, perspective, and musical and formal sensibilities are entirely artful and unique.

Buffam’s poems are narrated by a speaker who mocks revelation: “My hair has grown well past my shoulders, / a feat I achieved by not cutting it. // Also this year I have learned something new / about daylight. It keeps us awake.” This is a speaker self-consciously wary of mystical visions and cosmic vibrations, whose lines are delivered in a flat voice we might imagine to be monotone, and yet the poetic leaps are oracular and beautiful: “Here swallows thread the middle distance / insects quicken with delight. // Delight because I say it is, because / it might be nothing but their hunger // buzzing dully into less.” When Buffam undercuts the power of her own observations, she does so with an irony and humility that deepens the profundity of her gaze and invites us closer in.

In many of the poems, Buffam uses stanzas of two to five lines, though there are accomplished prose poems here such as “Please Take Back the Sparrows” and terse, playful lyrics like the series “Inklings” whose couplets broken up with dashes remind me most of Dickinson’s muscular and ecstatic hymns. Buffam investigates the interstices of formal gestures and experimental linguistic play and the commingling of the two approaches to writing produces a refreshing aesthetic in Canadian poetry, a national poetics that tends to be polarized between

the traditional and experimental. If this book proves anything, it’s that there is much to be won by speaking in both tongues.

As for Solie’s poetic brilliance, she proved it unequivocally in her first book with startling lines I remember by heart: “I don’t believe in fate, but did then, / having already drowned the kitten / in the rain barrel. I cannot speak / to most of what you have done.” In *Modern and Normal*, Solie’s moments are less startling, but the work is accomplished for its labyrinthine intellectual curiosity and rebellious wit. Levity is offered in tandem with grapplings with physics and philosophy, and sometimes the poems are pure fun as in “Self-Portrait in a Series of Professional Observations”:

... Test scores indicate aptitude  
for a career in the secretarial sciences.  
Handwriting  
suggests some latent hostility. A diligent  
worker,  
though often late. Please note:  
  
an AC/DC t-shirt does not constitute  
professional  
attire. You drove how long on that spare?

With musings such as this, Solie shares the kindred spirit’s contempt for the careerisms and other quirks of the modern. As it happens, the lyrical talent of this book is anything but normal.

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## Diaries that *Schmeck*

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**Christl Verduyn, ed.**

*Must Write: Edna Staebler’s Diaries.* Wilfrid Laurier UP \$24.95

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**Mary Meigs; Lise Weil, ed.**

*Beyond Recall.* Talonbooks \$19.95

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Reviewed by Laurie McNeill

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Reading someone else’s diary can be a fraught experience, even (or perhaps especially) when that diary has been edited and shaped for publication. Not all content translates well from the personal and daily to the

public and “literary,” the book-length treatment of one’s everyday life, and, as we all know from e-mail and other written correspondence, what might be meant as sarcasm or irony can come across, years later, to an unintended reader, as narcissistic or nasty. Generically, the diary requires the inscription of the daily and domestic, with all the repetition, shorthand, and mundane material that such writing entails (unless the diarist happens to be living in an extraordinary time or place). But diaries can also be engaging texts that provide unparalleled insight into a particular period in the diarist’s life, or, in the case of veteran diarists, capture a life as it unfolds over decades. Two recently published diaries illustrate the value and the vexations of reading this genre. The first, *Must Write: Edna Staebler’s Diaries*, presents selections from Staebler’s eight decades of diaries along with several of her magazine articles. The second, *Beyond Recall*, collects Mary Meigs’ final diaries along with free-writing exercises and faxed letters to Marie-Claire Blais.

Staebler, a writer and journalist who created the Edna Staebler Award for Creative Non-fiction, is best-known for her popular *Schmecks* cookbook series. She is also an almost lifelong diarist, having kept notebooks from the age of sixteen until a stroke at age ninety-eight stopped her writing. Editor Christl Verduyn selected entries from each decade of Staebler’s diaries, choosing material based on the theme of writing, a vocation that Staebler found both exhilarating and problematic. “Must write,” the phrase Verduyn uses for the title, finds its way into many entries over the decade: Staebler is compelled to write, but finds doing so extremely challenging. Her frustration over her perceived laziness and fear becomes one oft-plucked string in her litany of writing woes. Even in her eighties she chastises herself for not being disciplined enough to produce: “I have lots of time to write. I haven’t been anywhere for almost

three weeks and all I’ve accomplished was a rehash of *Schmecks* for a piece on Mennonite cooking . . . will I do anything to change my slothfulness?”

Though this focus on writing allowed Verduyn to whittle hundreds of thousands of manuscript pages into a publishable form, it limits the flavour of the text and its scope; after hundreds of entries, Staebler’s difficulties with writing become as wearisome for the reader as they were for the writer. Further, because this theme turns attention away from much of the personal material, including Staebler’s problematic marriage, it effectively and artificially divides the writing from the living; such a separation is particularly unfortunate for Staebler, since her professional writing has been so closely associated with the personal and domestic. Verduyn’s short biographies that preface each decade attempt to paper over these narrative gaps, but the general result is disjointed. The inclusion of a wider range of material, perhaps over a shorter time, would have provided readers with some much-needed respite from Staebler’s persistent self-flagellation as well as showcasing her talents—evident from her journalism and cookbooks—as a keen and witty social observer. Given that the book is published as part of the *Wilfrid Laurier Life Writing Series*, which aims to reach both popular and scholarly readers, this thematic fidelity may be additionally problematic. Fans of the *Schmecks* series, for example, may find the “Edna” they meet in these pages very different from her lively cookbook persona.

This edition does important recovery work, bringing attention to a woman writer who is not well-recognized in the Canadian literary canon. Indeed, Staebler recognizes throughout her career that her work is critically underappreciated and that she is dismissed as “just a cookbook writer,” despite her professional success in several genres, particularly the modes of creative non-fiction. Verduyn argues in her introduction that the

publication of the diary recognizes, as Staebler hadn't, the legitimacy of the diary as writing—"real" writing, a literary enterprise, as worthy of attention as Staebler's professional publications. In 1986, Staebler notes, "All my life I have talked about writing and kept scribbling in my notebook as if that makes me a writer"; *Must Write* suggests that, in spite of herself, she did become one. Though her strongest and most interesting writing will be found in her published works, not in her diary, these pages certainly illustrate the toll of the writing life for this particular author.

While writer's block made it difficult for Staebler to pick up her pen, a much more serious situation almost stopped Mary Meigs from writing at all. In her poignant and eloquent preface to *Beyond Recall*, Meigs asks, "Is old age the ideal way to finish living?" Struggling with the after-effects of a debilitating stroke, Meigs jots down in her diary the events and vexations of each day. In addition, she becomes an assiduous recorder of dreams, in which friends and family, long dead, frequently appear. Her observations of her garden, cats, and conversations with friends and caregivers fill many of her entries, and illustrate both the lively intellect still at work (despite her feeling of "having [her] mind snipped in two") and the reduced parameters of her life, now largely confined to her home. The faxed letters to Blais, in which Meigs writes as her cat, Miky, to Blais' cat Mouser, are a particularly worthwhile addition to the diary narrative. These faxes are charming and intimate, with small sketches (soundly critiqued by "Miky") and heavy doses of Meigs' biting self-deprecating humour, which is also in evidence throughout the diary.

In her daily portraits of such mundane acts as eating, sleeping, dressing, or using the telephone, Meigs testifies to the sheer effort these ordinary tasks require after a serious illness. She writes of her anger—at herself, at her caregivers, at the situation—

and her subsequent contrition, capturing her sense of frustration, grief, and, occasionally, joy in her final months. Her sense of loss is palpable, as she mourns not only friends and family now dead but also her own deteriorating sense of self. "In old age I sit and brood," she writes. "My friends make touching efforts to make me happy. But the old happiness, the kind that took over my entire body and which I can remember from childhood, has no energy and doesn't last long, . . . has a hint of doubt in it." Sensitively edited by Lise Weil, who inserts the occasional clarifying footnote but largely stays out of Meigs' way, *Beyond Recall* provides an eloquent coda to Meigs' literary oeuvre, as well as pithy material for scholars working in the fields of Canadian literature, life writing, and disability and aging studies.

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## Just Before the Fall

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**Rigoberta Menchu**

*The Girl from Chimel.* Groundwood \$18.95

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**Nicola I. Campbell**

*Shi-shi-etko.* Groundwood \$16.95

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**Jean E. Pendziwol**

*The Red Sash.* Groundwood \$16.95

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Reviewed by Hilary Turner

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When Europeans first arrived in the Americas, it seemed to some that they had been given a second opportunity to dwell in paradise—an already populated paradise, to be sure, but one that looked even more boundless and full of potential than the first. We know now that in the luggage of the explorers, the fur traders, the Conquistadores, and others, there was a reptilian stowaway—of the same species, probably, as the serpent who had caused so much trouble and grief in the original Eden. Damage and grief, at any rate are the hallmarks of both stories. Though the Judeo-Christian account of the Fall has never played a significant role in the Aboriginal

cultures of the Americas, there is general agreement on one of its cardinal points: things were better before, and worse after. All three of these books, narrated from the Native point of view, portray nostalgia for a fleeting golden age. All three set out, with regret, but without recrimination, to capture in words and pictures the moment in time before better turned to worse.

Rigoberta Menchu, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 for her work on behalf of the Maya in Guatemala, has produced a vivid memoir of her girlhood in the then unspoiled village of Chimel. The focus of *A Girl from Chimel* is a riverside community at the foot of a mountain, vividly portrayed through the brilliant illustrations—mainly in red, gold, green, and purple—of the Native Mexican artist, Domi. Interlaced with stories of Menchu's own family history and with ancestral tales told by her grandfather, the book memorializes an idyllic interdependency between the human and the natural: "We'd eat blackberries with brown sugar and give away small jars of honey. Rivers would reflect the sky like a glass snake. The plants were green and abundant and honeycombs were full of bees. The rivers, the swamps, the fields, all of them were full of frogs, toads, crabs, and snakes—when I was a little girl in Chimel." Such past-tense vignettes are all the more poignant for the reader who knows of the 30-year civil war that was to begin in 1954. Two hundred thousand Guatemalans killed, 450 Mayan villages destroyed: though these events play no direct part in *A Girl From Chimel*, they hover just outside the margin of the text, reminding us of the precariousness of any earthly paradise.

A similar sense of impending loss is evoked by *Shi-shi-etko*, Nicola Campbell's first book. This is a gorgeously illustrated story of a young Salish girl's last four days with her family, just before she is to be taken away to a residential school. The vivid watercolours of Kim LaFave show us the

girl bidding goodbye to all her touchstones: the creek, the grass, the rocks and sand, the insects, the crayfish, the minnows, the tadpoles, the mountains, and the trees. Shi-shi-etko's efforts to retain the spirit of these beings in her memory is punctuated by the refrain "only three more sleeps . . . only two . . . only one more sleep" until it is time to leave them all behind. Still, the cattle truck that will take the children away arrives without fanfare, and the ending of the story is understated. "Dear Grandfather Tree," says Shi-shi-etko, "please keep my memories and my family safe. I will be home in the spring." The lyricism of Nicola Campbell's prose makes the point that such pristine experiences can and should be held in memory. Only the author's foreword warns of the deprivations and hardships that are likely to greet the children at their destination.

With a more complex plot than either of the two previous works, *The Red Sash* by Jean E. Pendziwol sets the Native experience in a detailed historical context. A young Métis boy who lives with his mother on the shore of Lake Superior, circa 1800, experiences and describes the annual rendezvous of the voyageurs—his father among them—from their winter trapping and trading in Western Canada. In part a coming-of-age story, in part a glimpse into the operations of the fur trade, this book brings to life an important chapter in the early history of Canada. Illustrations by Nicholas Debon show the various trades that sustain life at Fort William in interesting detail, and give a strong sense of the sheer power and magnitude of the surrounding landscape. Lake Superior, when stormy, is a force to be reckoned with; and the central episode of the story has the narrator heroically rescuing one of the administrators of the North West Company from a watery grave. In recognition of his bravery, the boy receives the red sash of the voyageurs, and is welcomed into their ranks. Though mainly

sunny in its outlook, the book subtly hints at the racial and cultural hierarchy that directed commercial ventures into western Canada, and will certainly suggest to the discerning reader that later chapters in the story are somewhat darker.

Groundwood Books is to be commended for the publication of these three books. Each is a solid testimonial to the depth and richness of the Native relationship with nature, but none is heavy-handed in its reminder that rivers, lakes, and forests are essential to life in this hemisphere. On the contrary, by remembering and celebrating life in the garden before the fall, each writer and illustrator encourages us to preserve what remains unspoiled and to restore, as best we can, the damage we have done.

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## Massacres and Floods

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**Sandra Birdsell**

*Children of the Day*. Random House \$35.95

**Michael Crummey**

*The Wreckage*. Doubleday \$34.90

Reviewed by Barbara Pell

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Sandra Birdsell, who has published six novels and short story collections, including the Giller-nominated *The Russlander*, returns in her most recent novel to the story rooted in her own family background: the tension between two dispossessed peoples—the Métis and the Mennonites—in the history of Manitoba. *Children of the Day* narrates one day in June 1953 in the life of the Vandal family: Métis father, Mennonite mother—both alienated from their families because of their union—and ten children. The novel is effectively told from multiple narrative viewpoints, interweaving and overlapping individual stories against the larger canvas of historical injustices and personal failings. Some of the hapless Vandal children function as centres of consciousness, but the plot focuses on the parents, who have effectively abandoned them this day. Sara spends the

whole day in bed, afraid that she is pregnant again and that her husband will desert her for his French and childhood sweetheart (whose snobbish family would not let her marry a “half-breed”); Oliver wanders the countryside, brooding over the loss of his job as hotel manager and the loss of his people’s land and heritage. At the climax, Oliver finally comes home to affirm his present loves and responsibilities over his past losses, and Sara emerges from the bedroom to realize the traumatic legacy of her past as a child survivor of the 1917 Mennonite massacre narrated in *The Russlander*. The violent confrontation between Oliver’s brother and Sara’s brother-in-law ironically illustrates the tragedies of the two displaced peoples as Romeo accuses Kornelius of taking over the land, lost after Batoche, that rightfully belongs to the Vandal family. In the end then, Kornelius buys land for a new home for Oliver’s family “because he understands from his old-country experience what it means to have land pulled out from under your feet and claimed by others.”

Despite the historical tragedies and family curses that haunt the Vandals, Birdsell gives them a satisfying resolution full of love, grace, and new beginnings. The novel’s fragmented narrative smoothly connects the past with its present consequences and the individuals with their family future.

Michael Crummey’s first novel, *River Thieves*, was also a Giller nominee, a brilliant historical rendition of nineteenth century Newfoundland and the destruction of the native Beothuks. *The Wreckage* moves into more recent history—the first two sections are set in 1940 and 1945—but also deals with the complexities and ambiguities of love, hate, and self-knowledge. Or, as Crummey says, “the book is about this human impulse to try and create meaning out of what falls into our lives . . . wreckage, complete happenstance.”

In 1940 Wish Furey (his name indicating the conflicting poles of his nature) is a rootless



young Catholic from the Avalon Peninsula who falls in love with Mercedes (Sadie) Parsons in a remote Protestant Newfoundland outpost as he travels around showing Hollywood movies. Driven from her by the violent prejudice of Sadie's family (particularly her mother, who, as Sadie much later discovers, ironically was herself a Catholic embittered by discrimination), Wish returns to St. John's and immediately enlists in the British Army. In the Far East, he is eventually imprisoned in a Japanese POW camp and tormented by a sadistically anti-Canadian officer, Nishino. Meanwhile, Sadie courageously goes to St. John's in search of Wish, corresponds with him until he is captured, and faithfully waits for him until she hears of his death. Only then does she marry the American officer who has wooed her and moves to the States, where she raises a family, and bravely endures her own tragedies, for the next forty-nine years.

In the third section, set in 1994, Sadie returns to St. John's with her husband's ashes and unexpectedly encounters Wish. The reader now learns that he has been so traumatized by his sense of guilt after the bombing of Nagasaki and his own violent (and, he realizes, racist) revenge against the Japanese officer that he has deceived Sadie and has wandered around the States and finally home in an alcohol-and-sex-fuelled agony of atonement. At the end, Sadie offers to rekindle their love, but Wish repudiates her and tries to destroy her idealism about their relationship. Nevertheless, when his crazy Aunt Lilly, who fancies herself a priest, "marries" them at the end, Wish has the grace to cry, as Mercedes (whose name means "Mercy") says "Amen."

The wreckage of Wish's life began when a tidal wave washed away his home and family. His relationship with Sadie was "a kind of penance," an attempt to "erase his own sense of guilt," his original sin in a life in which "everything that had ever happened to [him] seemed part of some mad joke

designed to be the end of him." He says, "It's a good life if you don't weaken," but he does weaken; he doesn't have Sadie's courage to redeem the accidents of life with the faithfulness of love. Instead, "he'd nailed himself to the cross of that denial [of their love] long ago and had been faithful to it all his life"—a life of aimless, self-deluded, drunken wandering. Crummey deftly delineates the moral complexities and fanatical loyalties of characters adrift on a sea of fate, sorting through the flotsam of life—good and evil—searching for redemption. The plot surprises, though occasionally contrived, usually illustrate the themes of life's happenstance and human fallibility. However, the subplot of Nishino somewhat weakens the novel, which begins with a sympathetic portrait of the officer that suggests he will play a more prominent part in the main plot than he does. Moreover, while there is some motivation given in his background in Vancouver for his hatred of Canadians (thereby implicating the reader in the theme of racial intolerance), it is not sufficient to explain his sadism. Therefore, his character threatens to become a monstrous racial stereotype of the kind Crummey condemns.

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## Scots Emigrant Literature

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**Margaret Bennett**

*Oatmeal and the Catechism: Scottish Gaelic Settlers in Quebec.* McGill-Queen's UP \$32.95

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**Jenni Calder**

*Scots in Canada.* Luath P \$19.95

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Reviewed by Michael Newton

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We can mediate our reality through literature, allowing the imagination to order lived experience into memorable and meaningful narrative structures. Such literary narratives provide an important supplement to "official documentation," especially for the study of an individual or society whose language and culture differ from those responsible for creating the records normally used in the

writing of history. Although the two books under review discuss Scottish emigrants in Canada more widely, I will here only examine their use of written literature, oral narrative, and oral history to augment our understanding of the experience of Scottish immigration to Canada.

Margaret Bennett's book on emigrants from the Outer Hebrides (especially the island of Lewis) to the Eastern Townships of Quebec provides what may be the most detailed examination of any Scottish immigrant community in North America. She begins with the historical background of the emigrations that began in 1838 and continued in successive waves as late as the First World War. After a brief historical panorama, she quickly focuses on the fabric of everyday life, as suggested by the titles of chapters: "Homesteading in the Eastern Townships," "Making a Living," "In Sickness and in Health," "Faith of our Fathers," and so on. Extensive quotations, transcribed by Bennett from field recordings made in 1976 and from 1990 through 1995, allow the last generation of Scottish Gaelic speakers to tell a great deal of the story in their own words.

Although many emigrants of the first generation spoke only Gaelic, English and French became increasingly common in successive generations, especially as formal institutions did nothing to encourage or develop Gaelic. With the rapid extinction of the mother tongue of the original immigrants, the Québécois Scotch became aware of the loss of a great deal of the oral history of their communities. Bennett was thus both encouraged and aided by the descendants of the Hebridean emigrants who wished to see some memory of their settlement of the Eastern Townships preserved for future generations, even if they speak French rather than Gaelic.

Oral literary traditions not only entertained their audience; they also had didactic, moral, social, and functional purposes. As social commentary, for example, "their

ephemeral compositions could tease, shame or ridicule anyone who stepped outside the line of behaviour acceptable to the majority." The extensive repertoire of folk tales and folk songs carried by emigrants helped to maintain a link with the Old Country in general, but the cultural memory encoded in these narratives could be specific to family and locale. Bennett gives particularly compelling descriptions of the social context for the performance of oral tradition, especially the *céilidh* ("house visit"). In the chapter "Traditions of the Taigh Céilidh," she conveys a rich sense of the traditional mixture of hospitality, familial warmth, innate curiosity and chains of association that characterize these gatherings. The *céilidh* was not the only setting where emigrants shared their songs and stories: Bennett also gives valuable glimpses into the all-male gatherings at lumber camps and the all-female gatherings at the *luadh* ("fulling-bee").

Oral tradition allows a community to explain itself to itself, even though those explanations and perceptions may change over time according to criteria that also change over time. While historians may wish to debate how well the memories and literary remnants of a relatively small sampling from the last generation of Gaelic-speaking Québécois do or do not accord with other forms of historical documents, Bennett's results do appear to be internally consistent with other Scottish Gaelic communities in North America and Scotland. Her insider's work on the everyday life of these transplanted Hebrideans certainly deserves to be read alongside any other interpretation of the history of this area.

Jenni Calder's book gives a much broader summary account of Scots in Canada, from the failed 1629 plantation to the present, stitching together many localized studies, including Bennett's, which she features prominently. Calder follows a roughly chronological plan through the history of

Canada, highlighting the role that Scots have played in the settlement, government, development and expression of Canada and Canadian culture.

Too many books of this nature have been simple, uncritical celebrations of Scots abroad; refreshingly, Calder does not flinch from also pointing out some of the ironies and contradictions inherent in the European exploitation of a land already settled by Native peoples. Nor does she underplay the distinctions and rivalries between different sorts of Scots—Highlanders, Lowlanders, Orkney-men, etc.—and the inevitable conflicts of interests that arose in endeavours from the fur trade to the formation of the Dominion of Canada's first government.

The book's most compelling passages incorporate literary sources, demonstrating how emigrant literature served not just as personal memoir but also as a very functional guide for would-be immigrants to the Canadian wilderness. As Calder points out, John Galt was influential not just as an author of fiction about Scottish migration but as an active player in the politics, law and infrastructural planning of Canadian settlement. Her choice selection of modern fiction demonstrates the ongoing discussion about identity, culture and belonging in Canada, and the place of Scots and Scottish culture in it. Disappointingly, however, Gaelic literature only appears in translation with no indication that it was originally not written in English; moreover, she makes some factual errors in discussing Gaelic texts. (For example, John MacCodrum composed poetry for emigrants to North Carolina, not Canada, and did not leave the Hebrides himself.)

Perhaps inevitably, a book that attempts to be ambitious in scope, accessible to the general public, and concise cannot always satisfy every audience. The text is not always as clear as it could be, and there are no references to direct the reader to primary sources. Still, Calder succeeds in providing

an up-to-date overview of Scottish emigration to Canada that will serve a popular readership well.

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## Escaping Prisons

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**David Bergen**

*The Time In Between.* McClelland & Stewart  
\$34.99

**Karen Connelly**

*The Lizard Cage.* Random House \$34.95

Reviewed by Lisa Grekul

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In David Bergen's *The Time In Between* and Karen Connelly's *The Lizard Cage*, readers are transported to Southeast Asia—to, more specifically, Vietnam, in the case of the former novel, and to Burma in the latter. These fictional narratives clearly grew out of their authors' "real life" travels to and fascinations with these "other" parts of the world (Bergen spent six months in Danang in 1996, and Connelly has made numerous visits to Thailand and Burma over the past decade), but a number of additional parallels can be drawn between the authors and their texts. Bergen and Connelly both have published impressive bodies of work. *The Time In Between* is Bergen's fifth book; it follows a collection of short fiction and three previous novels. *The Lizard Cage*, Connelly's first novel, was preceded by five books of poetry and two books of creative non-fiction. The two writers share an interest, moreover, in how familial relationships are (re)defined in the midst or aftermath of trauma, and how individuals experience and escape imprisonment (literal and metaphorical). Despite the strengths of Bergen's novel, however, not to mention its Giller Prize win, Connelly takes her readers on a more compelling and more deeply moving journey into the fraught terrain not only of Southeast Asia but also of the human mind.

At the centre of *The Time In Between* is Charles Boatman's return to Vietnam in 1997, where he fought as an American soldier

almost 30 years before; his subsequent disappearance forces two of his children, Ada and Jon, to go to Vietnam themselves in search of their father. As the story unfolds, Boatman's and his children's experiences in modern-day Vietnam are juxtaposed against the horrors Boatman witnessed (and participated in) during the war. Upon returning to the United States, directly after the war, Boatman becomes detached from his wife; after she dies, he makes a home for their three children in Canada and proceeds to raise them in a laissez-faire manner. He is a man who has long needed to confront and lay to rest the ghosts of his past. The catalyst for his return to Vietnam is an autobiographical novel he reads about the war (*In a Dark Wood*) written by a Vietnamese author (Dang Tho). Going back, he thinks, could bring him resolution and peace: the trip, as he tentatively imagines it, might "conclude an event in his life that had consumed and shaped him." And yet, in a telling commentary on trauma's lingering aftermath, Boatman's "conclusion" (his suicide) becomes the starting point for his children's, and especially Ada's, struggle with guilt and grief. As she retraces her father's steps in Danang and its outlying villages, Ada takes on his quest to make sense of the past and reconcile it with the present and future.

Although what exactly Boatman hopes to find in Vietnam is unclear, even to him, he is unsettled by the apparent erasure of the war from the country's landscape and its people's memory: as he revisits villages in which he fought, he discovers that "[n]othing [is] familiar" to him; Vietnam has moved on, it seems, in part because "grief and despair are a luxury" for which the Vietnamese "have [neither] the money or time." If human connection is what he seeks, the closest he comes to it is through an affair he almost has with Elaine Gouds, an American expatriate whose missionary-husband's enthusiasm for Vietnam is matched by her

loathing of it. Ada, like her father, feels similarly alienated in a culture she cannot understand (Jon more or less abandons his sister; he spends the better portion of his time in Vietnam engaging in sexual liaisons with various men, including Elaine Gouds' husband Jack). Put off by Lieutenant Dat, the police officer in charge of her father's file, and irritated by Yen, the young boy who often turns up out of the blue to offer his help, Ada eventually tries to "know" Vietnam—and her father's relation to it—by becoming sexually involved with an artist who was briefly acquainted with Boatman. "She did not know," Bergen writes, "why she was sleeping with Hoang Vu. Perhaps he was the country, or her father, or simply a notion of the country, or a notion of her father." But even that connection fails. Though Ada wants to share her life story with Vu, he does not want to know "the facts of her childhood or the details of her life." Cross-cultural understanding seems impossible, and in the end Ada comes to see her entire trip as a kind of feverish hallucination: "[t]his in between time, the voyage out and back, all of that was a dream." If there is resolution in this novel, it is enacted through Ada's departure from Vietnam; still ambivalent about her father's decision to free himself from the prison of his past, she takes comfort in telling herself that "life had been real once, and it would be again."

The reality of life under Burma's dictatorial regime is the broad backdrop of *The Lizard Cage*. The narrative sharply focuses on the life of one man (Teza, or the "Songbird"), a political prisoner in solitary confinement who is in the eighth year of his 20-year sentence. Arrested in 1988 for his involvement in mass protests, he is a songwriter whose words and voice pose an ongoing threat to the state. As he struggles to survive inside the "teak coffin" (his cell), within "the cage" (the prison itself), the corrupt authorities try to devise ways to extend his sentence. Through Teza's

thoughts, memories, and dreams, readers learn about his family members and his childhood. We learn, too, about the lengths he must go to, and the sacrifices he must make, in order to stay alive. The horrors of the prisoners' existence in the cage are myriad: poor food, buckets for latrines, rats, and the threat of malnutrition and disease, not to mention frequent, harsh beatings at the hands of corrupt wardens. Teza, however, suffers more than the others. His meals are especially meagre, and so he must eat lizards—breaking the first precept of Buddhism (“to abstain from harming or killing sentient beings”)—in order to keep up his strength. Unlike other prisoners, he has human contact only with the criminal Sein Yun, who serves him his food, and Handsome, a particularly vindictive jailer; sometimes, too, he is visited by Chit Naing, a guilt-ridden senior warden who is fond of (and kind to) the Songbird. But Teza has no contact with the world outside the cage; writing materials, for him, are strictly forbidden. The narrative gains momentum when Teza is given the opportunity—if he trusts Sein Yun—to write a letter that will be ostensibly smuggled out of the cage. The beating that ensues comes dangerously close to killing him. While his injuries are being treated, he meets and befriends the rat-killer, a twelve-year-old orphan boy who lives in the prison. As the bond between the Songbird and “Nyi Lay” (“little brother”) grows, they begin the process of freeing themselves from the cage: Nyi Lay will go to a monastery school, and Teza will initiate a hunger strike to end his life.

*The Lizard Cage* is long (510 pages), and its premise might feel, to some, dark and depressing, but Connelly's astonishing characters, her carefully-constructed plot, and her poetic language combine to produce a flawless, if heartbreaking, novel that is hard to put down and impossible to forget. Readers will learn much about the Burmese people's struggle for freedom, their history,

politics, and culture—not only from the story but also from the many photographs that Connelly took during her travels—and they will be left, as importantly, with a fuller understanding of human beings' capacity for cruelty as well as kindness. As disturbing as much of the novel necessarily is, faith in humanity becomes its overarching message. The inmates of the cage are not the only prisoners in this story; their jailers are imprisoned in their own way by the power that they are expected to wield. Teza's ability to be himself—to be a human being—in the presence of Chit Naing, his jailer, liberates both men: “Teza refused to act like a prisoner, which freed Chit Naing from acting like a jailer.” That Teza finds family (Chit Naing and the orphan boy) in the cage is remarkable; that he is able then to “release himself” from the prison marks the triumph of goodness over hate and fear. His decision to stop eating empowers him to bring peaceful resolution to a long, angry struggle: “I do not want to die hating them,” he tells Chit Naing, “the awful *them*. Who are they? They are my own people. You were once *them*.” Sending Nyi Lay to school is his final act of love: though he knows that he will never see the boy again, Teza willingly makes the sacrifice to ensure that his “little brother's” desperate desire to learn how to read will be fulfilled.

Both *The Lizard Cage* and *The Time In Between* draw attention to language and its potential to change lives: it is a book, after all, that compels Boatman to return to Vietnam, and it is Teza's songs of protest which land him in prison. But whereas Bergen's understated exploration of the power of language feels like a missed opportunity, Connelly's substantial thematization of words (their value, their potency) becomes the richest aspect of her novel. The most poignant moments in *The Lizard Cage* are those in which Nyi Lay tries unsuccessfully to teach himself to read (“the boy's eyes manoeuvre over the page slowly, laboriously,

like two ants carrying a piece of food many times their own size . . . [he] holds the book and believes it: *I am reading I am reading*"). His longing to make meaning out of letters is mirrored by Teza's hunger for the written word (he painstakingly takes apart cigarettes so that he can read the bits of newspaper in which they are wrapped). The importance of language—as a means of connecting people, communicating truth, keeping love and hope alive—is further underscored when Nyi Lay risks his life by bringing paper and pen to Teza and then smuggling out his friend's words. Language, which was the reason for Teza's imprisonment, becomes the carrier of his spirit after his death; it becomes another form of freedom for him, long after he is gone. For this reason, perhaps, Teza's death in *The Lizard Cage* animates a fuller range of human emotion than does Boatman's in *The Time In Between*. Both characters, in committing suicide, find a way to escape their respective prisons, but readers are likely to remember only one.

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## Women Writing Women

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**Laura Beatrice Berton**

*I Married the Klondike*. Lost Moose \$18.95

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**Deborah Heller**

*Literary Sisterhoods: Imagining Women Artists*.  
McGill-Queen's UP \$65.00

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Reviewed by A. Mary Murphy

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Republished 50 years after its original appearance, Laura Berton's memoir of life in Dawson more than holds up under the weight of time. The prose reads with surprising freshness given the context: Edwardian-period kindergarten teacher arrives in the North in 1907 and stays for 25 years, through World War I and into the Great Depression. But Berton manages to maintain decorum and protect her privacy at the same time that she provides lively anecdotes and character sketches. She does this balancing act by situating a drunk or a

prostitute in an interesting vignette without slowing her pace to examine social ills in any depth. Neither does she reveal much at all about her family relationships—she does not even name her children. Apparently, the children never misbehaved and there was never any domestic discord. Such is the right of the memoirist: there is no obligation to tell or to analyze.

Still, there is a wholeness about the book, a thoroughness of scope, if not depth. The geography and climate of the region play their powerful parts as the Bertons spend an idyllic two weeks on the river in summer and as a Mountie patrol loses its way and starves to death in winter. Berton draws a general picture of the Yukon she knew by naming many rivers and settlements around Dawson, but she reserves specifics for Dawson itself. She describes buildings and streets and then populates them with people such as Apple Jimmy and Big Alec and Dolly Orchard and The Bird and "the painted ladies" of Klondike City, across the river. Her surreptitious observation of the working girls' daylight hours is one of the pleasures of the book: "the whores, laughing and singing, calling out to each other and chattering like bright birds."

Dawson society is carefully explained. She itemizes a "polyglot population" of church officials, political figures, government employees, merchants, and miners. Berton frequently surprises with revelations about things such as eight-course meals served on Irish linen and Limoges china. She occasionally disturbs with a racially-charged adjective here and there—one of the ways the book shows its age. The sophistication of evening dress at formal dinners and the requisite calling cards and "at homes" are localized by the particular snacks absolutely required at parties (salted almonds, stuffed olives, and pineapple sherbet) and by Dawson's anachronistic devotion to the minuet, "that incongruous spectacle of the sourdoughs gamely pirouetting and

bowing as the snow swept down outside and the huskies howled.”

Diamond Tooth Gert and Robert Service are here, of course, but they are no more prominent than any other of Dawson’s characters. And while Berton reveals the origins of “The Cremation of Sam McGee” and of the boiled boots in Chaplin’s *The Gold Rush*, she does not by any means extract all romance and myth from the North. Instead, positioning herself as insider helps to make her believable. She can therefore weave her own romance and myth of the Klondike. *I Married the Klondike* is an artfully genteel piece of Canadiana worthy of a renewed readership.

In *Literary Sisterhoods*, Deborah Heller takes a far more critical look at relations between and among female artists, both real and imaginary. Her exemplary texts, all written by women, are drawn from across geography and time: Germaine de Staël’s *Corinne, ou, l’Italie* (1807); George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1876); Anna Banti’s *Artemisia* (1947); Alice Munro’s *Friend of My Youth* (1990); and Grace Paley’s Faith stories, beginning with *The Little Disturbances of Man* (1959). Part of the purpose of this historical sampling is to show “the metafictional relation between writer-narrator and her subject” becoming “more pronounced and deliberate” over time. Heller reflects on three “sisterhoods”: that of author and artist-subject in each book; that of each artist-subject and other women in the same book; and, that of the five female authors whose work is discussed.

Heller observes that Staël, Eliot, and Banti focus on the exceptional talents and qualities of their artist-protagonists and exact from these characters a great cost for art. Munro and Paley, on the other hand, have the luxury of allowing their artist-protagonists to experience closer relationships with other women than is possible in Staël, Eliot, and Banti, and to do so because they are not centred on their own

“exceptionality.” Heller situates Virginia Woolf at the crux of this transition: “No one has more eloquently presented the costs to an aspiring woman artist of earlier times than Woolf.” Woolf’s contribution is “the literary normalization of the woman artist.” Henceforth, she is permitted an “ordinary life,” unlike her predecessors, who were forced to choose between a life in domesticity and a life in art.

Almost half of *Literary Sisterhoods* is devoted to Grace Paley’s Faith stories, clearly showing Heller’s preference among her selected texts. George Eliot’s chapter, for example, is a brief 12 pages, as opposed to Paley’s hefty 58. This disparity, along with the isolation of the chapters from each other, deprives the topic at hand of a desired balance. The argument would be even stronger if there were more fluidity among the discussions, if writers and subjects surfaced occasionally in discussions of each other. This happens only at the start of the Eliot chapter, to serve as a transition from Staël. Such intertextuality would solidify Heller’s discussion. And the book would benefit from a concluding chapter, something to follow the in-depth examinations of these five exemplars, to bring them together at the finish. It is basic composition practice to do so, but Heller leaves us to our own devices in the end. Nevertheless, this collection of relatively independent essays is significant grounding for an ongoing, collective, sisterly critical practice—a chapter for Woolf herself; another for Helen Graham in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Heller’s thesis generously lends itself to this continued process.



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## Smack! Whup! Honk!

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**Thomas King**

*A Short History of Indians in Canada.*

HarperCollins \$24.95

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Reviewed by Duffy Roberts

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In the title story from Thomas King's long-overdue short story collection, *A Short History of Indians in Canada*, Indians fall out of the sky onto Toronto's Yonge Street. Their collision with concrete elicits the sounds Smack!, Whup!, and Honk!—oh wait, that last bit of onomatopoeia is from a municipal truck. Many of the stories have already been made available, textually or vocally, in other forms prior to this collection—on CBC and Alaska Radio, in the *National Post*, *The New Quarterly*, and *The Malahat Review*, for example. The "History" King's title refers to is nothing like the history learned in social studies; the only official historical document mentioned is the Indian Act of 1875 (and its multiple revisions), an act that fails to be "a great moment in Canadian history" only because it doesn't have a holiday. And *History's* modifier, "short"? Well, that sounds an awful lot as if Coyote tricked King into using that adjective, and we all know Coyote's stories are "bent" (vocabulary used in another of King's short stories). And "Indians"? Well, we all know Columbus got that one wrong, a big masala lie.

I write this review while entertaining the possibilities in Thomas King's other texts—such as the brilliant *The Truth About Stories* and "A Coyote Columbus Story," which contains the aforementioned Coyote (as does "Coyote and the Enemy Aliens" in this collection)—with my American students at a US university. Because of my particular geography, I can't help but notice several barbs directed southward. "States to Avoid" makes a convincing argument that Utah is on the top of the list, while "The Closer You Get to Canada, the More Things Will Eat

Your Horses" reminds me of Rick Mercer's "Talking to Americans," particularly the funny bit of coyote trickery when Mercer asked students and professors alike at Harvard to sign a petition to end the Canadian government's practice of putting old people on ice floes. King's story, however, is distinctly more haunting. On the Fernhill Senior Game Preserve, old people attempting to escape to Canada must outrun bullets fired by hunters from behind hunting blinds. Mason Walthers, a 72-year-old seasoned participant, is part of a plan to take the place of the hunters, to "imagine" themselves out of the "damn system." After witnessing that a particular hunter reloads his gun from a full box of ammo when Mason believes them to have only one shot, Mason takes on the role of the hunter himself and for an afternoon makes a "meadow r[u]n with colour." This story is a commentary on how manipulation requires a set of shifting rules, on how justifying historically horrific acts requires a rifle's telescopic myopia; it is also a treatise on temptation, on how the sheer oppressive weight of history makes retribution gut-checkingly desirable.

On the lighter side, albeit no less probative (and probative humour is nothing if not a hallmark of King's storytelling), "Where the Borg Are" still has me convinced that Europeans are "Borg/Klingon/Vulcan/Romulan/Federation molecular composite[s]." Borg, you see, because they like to "assimilate" people—or as the Indian Act names it, "enfranchise" them. Klingon because they "love to fight simply for the sake of fighting." Vulcan because their propensity for measured thought aligns with the Governor in Council's authority to make decisions on how to "educate" Indian children. Romulan because they are "tricky." And Federation because the crew of the Enterprise ignored the Prime Directive—something about not interfering with emergent cultures—more than Captain Kirk



chased tail (not Coyote's). And finally, although left out of Milton Friendlybear's essay on the Indian Act for Ms. Merry, a touch of Ferengi as well. Ferengi because you don't have to jam a square peg into a round hole to make the Ferengi Rules of Acquisition take a seat at the treaty negotiation table. You be the judge: Rule Twenty-six: "The vast majority of the rich in this galaxy did not inherit their wealth; they stole it"; Rule Forty-two: "Only negotiate when you are certain to profit." "Where the Borg Are" is a good story.

There are too many stories in this collection to discuss in the space allotted. Some highlights include "The Baby in the Airmail Box," which plays with time and structural transitions and may be making an argument for Canada's official policy of multiculturalism 200 years too late; "Little Bombs," with its comments on communication strategies; and "The Colour of Walls," which suggests that multiple coats of paint do little to change the colour underneath.

This text should replace history books, should be a requirement for Social Studies students in high school, the final story especially. "Another Great Moment in Canadian Indian History" proposes an essential truth: helping is only helping when it's asked for. Good stories Thomas King. Good thinking too. And yes, I know, they aren't separate things.



## Spectres et vertiges

**Marie-Andrée Donovan**

*Fantômier*. Éditions David 12,00 \$

**Éric Charlebois**

*Centrifuge. Extrait de narration. Poésie faite de concentré*. Éditions David 15,00 \$

**Nadine McInnis; Trad. par Andrée Christensen et Jacques Flamand**

*First Fire / Ce feu qui dévore : Poems / Poèmes*. BuschekBooks / Éditions du Vermillon 15,00 \$

Compte rendu par Noële Racine

*Fantômier* de Marie-Andrée Donovan réunit neuf nouvelles comme autant de fantômes pour les narratrices habituellement d'âge mûr qui, étant écrivaines, se révèlent des doubles de l'auteure. Davantage « énergumèn[es...] origina[ux] » et « drôl[es] d'hurluberl[us] » que zombies ou lémures, ces fantômes, visiteurs indésirables de chair et d'os—ou de rêve—s'ingèrent dans la vie des autres, au point de vicier leur air par le poison de leur désespoir (tel « le revenant » Gustave). Marie-Andrée Donovan pratique un art du suspense qui culmine dans « Est-ce que je te dérange? », la nouvelle la plus savoureuse du recueil. En outre, *Fantômier* développe des thèmes similaires à ceux de ses ouvrages précédents, notamment l'amour du bleu (« La demie ») et l'écriture (« Le vendeur de billets »). L'auteure n'en renouvelle pas moins son style en cultivant un humour un tantinet caustique et en ajoutant des réflexions à teneur psychologique et sociale. Mais le lecteur n'y trouvera pas la délicieuse candeur (le « ver à soi », le « peu peu ordinaire ») ni les fins percutantes qui faisaient tout le sel des *Nouvelles volantes*. Dans *Centrifuge*, son troisième recueil (prix de poésie Trillium 2006), Éric Charlebois devient une sorte de « toupie gravisée » qui « graphite » et « grave » dans le langage pour accoucher de 33 poèmes de longueur variable (entre 1 et 9 pages chacun), titrés, généralement en vers libres et divisés en 8 « cercles » aux titres acidulés comme des

agrumes. *Centrifuge* développe une verticalité vertigineuse qui renonce au découpage strophique au profit d'une segmentation étourdissante du vers atteignant son paroxysme dans « Synthèse ». De la lecture, se dégage une impression de griserie langagière : y abondent non seulement paronomases, anadiploses et parallélismes sonores, mais également envolées délirantes (« Enfanfaraons »). Recueil prolixe, *Centrifuge* aurait gagné à être écrémé quelque peu pour conserver la force évocatoire des meilleures images, des plus brillants jeux de mots. Avec un dosage similaire à celui de *Faux-Fuyants*, il aurait sans doute mis davantage en valeur les poèmes les plus réussis, au premier rang desquels « Vindicté ».

*First Fire / Ce feu qui dévore*, quatrième recueil de poésie de Nadine McInnis, regroupe vingt-cinq poèmes titrés, en vers libres, et accompagnés de deux photographies couleurs de Vivian Tors qui, bien qu'elles fassent écho à certains poèmes, n'ont pas su me convaincre de leur pertinence. La force du recueil réside sans conteste dans sa *traduction* admirable, Andrée Christensen et Jacques Flamand ayant su rendre l'essence même des poèmes : « your eyelashes / bead into icy flashes of blindness » (« tes cils / se font diadèmes / aveuglements d'éclats glacés »). Ce recueil permettra au lecteur francophone de découvrir le parcours poétique de Nadine McInnis, des textes des premiers recueils précédant en effet ses nouveaux poèmes, globalement plus engagés, sans toutefois délaissier le thème de la maternité, une constante dans l'œuvre de l'auteure. Dans l'ensemble, des poèmes très forts (« Hésitation ») côtoient des textes qui le sont moins (« Nuptiales des écrevisses »), mais que rachètent des passages d'une beauté indéniable : « Peut-être préfères-tu avant tout que l'os demeure intact, / sous les plumes, au-dessus d'un cœur qui bat. »

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## Dictionnaires et histoire

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**Gerardo Acerenza, dir.**

*Dictionnaires français et littératures québécoise et canadienne-française.* Éditions David 20,00 \$

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**Fernand Ouellet**

*L'Ontario français dans le Canada français avant 1911.* Contribution à l'histoire sociale Prise de Parole 35,00 \$

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**Guy Gaudreau, dir.**

*Le drapeau franco-ontarien.* Prise de Parole 30,00 \$  
Compte rendu par Lucie Hotte

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La langue est un fort élément identitaire pour les francophones du Canada. Dispersés dans la masse anglophone, principalement s'ils habitent à l'extérieur du Québec, ils cherchent à signaler leur identité propre, à se distinguer de la majorité, en valorisant leur langue, leur culture et leur histoire. Si cette dernière est marquée par de nombreuses revendications, elle est aussi une quête de symboles pouvant les représenter et témoigner de leur présence en terre canadienne. Trois ouvrages récents abordent, chacun à leur manière, ces questions.

Le premier porte sur un sujet qui, à ma connaissance, n'avait pas fait l'objet d'études approfondies jusqu'à présent, soit la place qu'occupent les dictionnaires dans des textes littéraires québécois et canadiens-français ainsi que sur celle qu'occupent ces littératures dans les dictionnaires. L'ouvrage est divisé en trois parties qui entretiennent peu de liens entre elles. La première regroupe sept articles, particulièrement éclairants, sur la représentation des dictionnaires dans les œuvres. Il est fascinant de voir qu'en dépit des divers genres étudiés et de l'origine diverse des auteurs (québécoise, acadienne, franco-ontarienne) l'imaginaire linguistique est marqué par la tension entre l'utilisation d'une langue châtiée, perçue comme une marque de réussite sociale, et celle d'une langue plus vernaculaire. Les articles montrent cependant que la quête du mot juste, rare ou choquant ne s'avère pas

nécessairement salulaire, ni même possible, pour les personnages, alors que l'invention linguistique permet bien souvent leur épanouissement.

La seconde partie comprend trois articles sur la place qui est dévolue aux littératures et à la langue canadiennes-françaises dans les dictionnaires. Si le premier atteste que les citations littéraires d'auteurs canadiens de langue française sont peu nombreuses et assez récentes dans le *Petit Robert*, le second montre qu'elles sont beaucoup plus présentes dans *Le Trésor de la langue française*. Elles servent toutefois, dans les deux cas, essentiellement d'exemples pour des « régionalismes ». Le dernier texte porte sur l'utilisation de la citation littéraire dans le *Dictionnaire historique du français québécois* et le *Dictionnaire du français acadien* afin d'illustrer des prononciations non-standard. Ainsi, les citations littéraires d'auteurs francophones du Canada ne servent, comme on pouvait s'y attendre, qu'à ajouter une couleur canadienne-française dans les dictionnaires.

Les trois derniers textes traitent de la relation que les écrivains québécois entretiennent avec les dictionnaires. Marco Micone et Daniel Gagnon parlent de leur rapport aux dictionnaires alors que Sylvie Pierron fait état des conclusions d'une enquête qu'elle a menée auprès d'une dizaine d'écrivains québécois au sujet de leurs dictionnaires. Tous les textes montrent que la surconscience linguistique est un fait indéniable et tenace tant au Québec qu'au Canada français.

Avec *L'Ontario français dans le Canada français avant 1911*, nous remontons le temps. Dans cette étude monumentale, Fernand Ouellet retrace la place qu'occupent les Canadiens français au Canada, principalement les Québécois, les Acadiens et la Franco-Ontariens, à travers une analyse des divers recensements. Il fait d'abord le procès de l'historiographie traditionnelle en montrant à quel point elle a été influencée par le discours idéologique, notamment le discours nataliste, des élites cléricalo-nationalistes.

Chiffres à l'appui, il montre que les premières études démographiques interprétaient assez librement les données des recensements afin de servir le discours de l'élite. Il vise donc à donner ici une idée plus juste de la réalité canadienne-française d'avant 1911 sur les grandes questions : la démographie, l'agriculture, l'urbanisation et la scolarisation. La deuxième partie de l'ouvrage porte sur la composition ethnique et la place des francophones, en 1871, dans trois « régions » de l'Ontario : les cantons de Hawkesbury et d'Alfred ainsi que le comté de Prescott dans l'Est, les cantons de Malden et de Sandwich ainsi que le comté d'Essex dans le Sud et la ville d'Ottawa. L'ensemble de l'ouvrage est comparatiste et confronte la réalité des francophones aussi bien à celle des anglophones qu'à des autres ethnies. L'ouvrage décrit ainsi une société diversifiée où l'appartenance à une ethnie ou à une classe détermine largement la réalité des individus. Les francophones se retrouvent donc, pour des raisons essentiellement culturelles, dans une situation plus précaire que celle des anglophones sur tous les plans. Il s'agit là incontestablement d'une contribution importante à l'histoire sociale du Canada français. Cependant, ce livre n'est pas un ouvrage de vulgarisation. Il s'adresse d'abord et avant tout à des spécialistes, historiens et démographes.

*Le drapeau franco-ontarien* porte sur une page d'histoire plus récente : celle de la conception d'une bannière propre à la communauté francophone de l'Ontario. Ce beau livre, avec illustrations en couleurs, retrace l'histoire du drapeau vert et blanc, en la mettant en relation avec les événements marquants de l'histoire récente de l'Ontario français, de sa conception par Gaétan Gervais et Michel Dupuis, à sa reconnaissance officielle en 2001. Les auteures des quatre chapitres du livre, étudiantes au premier cycle en histoire à l'Université Laurentienne au moment de la rédaction, ont conçu leur texte en fonction de lecteurs non avertis : de

fait, tout ce qui y est relaté au sujet du contexte socioculturel est largement connu des gens qui s'intéressent tant soit peu à l'Ontario français.

Le premier chapitre dresse le portrait de l'effervescence culturelle des années 1970, à Sudbury, qui conduit à la création du drapeau. Le deuxième porte sur sa diffusion, de 1977 à 1995, principalement sur le rôle important que jouera le milieu scolaire, qui sera un des premiers à le reconnaître et à le hisser au mât des écoles. Le chapitre suivant porte sur les années 1995 à 2004. Il rend compte de la dernière étape vers la reconnaissance officielle. En dépit de la place de plus en plus grande faite au drapeau dans la communauté et de son omniprésence lors de la campagne SOS Montfort, tout n'est cependant pas gagné puisque plusieurs municipalités refuseront d'arborer le fanion franco-ontarien lorsque la communauté franco-ontarienne en fera la demande. Le dernier chapitre porte sur l'iconographie du drapeau franco-ontarien et retrace les divers drapeaux proposés au cours des ans. Le livre se clôt sur une postface signée par Gaétan Gervais, qui témoigne, avec humilité, du projet qui a conduit à l'élaboration du drapeau.

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## Touching Gods

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**D.Y. Béchard**

*Vandal Love*. Doubleday Canada \$29.95

Reviewed by Andrea Belcham

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Ostensibly tracing the travails of the Hervé family—a clan with roots in the landscape of the Gaspésie and shoots extending across North America—*Vandal Love* also presents a worldview with wider applications. The more appropriate phrase may be “larger applications,” for Béchard’s ambitious novel makes much of size. Early pages reveal that the many children of the doubly named patriarch Hervé Hervé “were born alternately brutes or runts.” This curious genetic

anomaly causes villagers to fear the Hervés “as if through some faint ancient recollection of stories that predated Christianity,” and nurtures in readers the idea of the family’s quasi-mythical status. Shunning an ‘ordinary-joe’ approach, Béchard instead presents his characters as twentieth-century gods—giants who go on to produce giants, runts who beget runts—and through their untouchability makes the case for a common quest of humankind.

The author focuses his gaze on two branches of the family tree: that of hefty Jude, who flees Quebec in a bid to save his ailing sister, and who stumbles into a career as a boxer in the US; and that of François, an elf pitied and smothered by his fanatical grandmother who eventually becomes a successful entrepreneur in BC. Each produces children who inherit both their father’s physique and his tendency toward restlessness: giantess Isa abandons Jude to enter into a loveless marriage, and tiny Harvey renounces François’ materialistic life by joining an ashram in New Mexico. Combined, their misadventures are many, but the stumbling block in the novel is not so much the challenge of differentiating characters as it is the inadequate attention Béchard devotes to each consciousness. Almost like the stern family head Hervé Hervé himself, Béchard never really achieves intimacy with his children; and as a result of his detachment, the reasoning behind the players’ actions, or inactions, is not always convincing.

Yet if they are gods, or primeval archetypes, then they *are* ultimately impenetrable. It could be that Béchard offers in place of closeness patterns of behaviour as the reader’s way into their souls. Migration is the most obvious feature of their shared destinies. Jude, for instance, is carried along by violence: “He saw no other choice but to fight and, fighting, to get himself somewhere where things were supposed to be better than before.” That “better” should be the

medicine woman who favours him despite his ugliness, who gives him a home and a child, but in the face of salvation he bends, abducts his baby daughter, and takes up a reclusive life as a stablehand. François is eager to bring salvation to others (first his prostitute lover, then his New Age-besotted wife, finally his floundering son), and their refusals deny his fulfillment. Migration, in Béchard's world, entails abandonment: it is a constant movement that is at the same time immobility, the ongoing pursuit of the elusive brass ring.

Not unexpectedly, the youngest generation—represented by Harvey and Isabelle, Isa's child—seeks out the heritage so rejected by their forebears: the author drops numerous hints that his tale will be a cyclical one (by his name alone, Harvey Hervé seems fated to be instrumental in this return home). Béchard concludes with characters on the cusp of "a new world, unexpected and good": Harvey has been tracked down by the genealogy nut Isabelle, and Béchard promises that the runts' and the giants' worlds will soon eclipse.

The novel begins with one man's departure from Quebec; from there, through the displaced Jude himself—afflicted by memories of his lost sister and culture—and through its broader cast of characters who feel similar tugs to both their Québécois history and modernity, it progresses to a more general examination of the schizophrenic appeal/pain of the exodus. What it is most, though, is appropriately alluded to in its title. A love that is "vandal" is one atypical, practised by misfits (be they runts or giants). It is a love desirous of company and self-denying; that a different, supportive love and, through it, an end to the Hervé family "curse" can be actualized seems likely given the book's ending. Béchard keeps his gods at arm's length, yet their dilemmas are not so foreign to us after all.

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## Interior Geographies

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**Holley Rubinsky**

*Beyond This Point*. McClelland & Stewart \$24.95

Reviewed by Deborah Torkko

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Holley Rubinsky's *Beyond This Point* unflinchingly captures an unwillingness to confront the truth of what is, to be honest with self and others, and to recognize the extraordinary in the ordinary. Rubinsky shows that "[t]he truth is seldom welcome," but it is still possible to face dark and painful circumstances of life and death, love and betrayal, despair and hope.

In this novel the rawness of geography and human struggle mirror one for the other the resilience of both. The setting is Ruth, a fictional town in the heart of British Columbia's interior, a place where forest fires rage and where the "land grows rocks. . . . And it is always on the move, in secret nooks and crannies underground." It is a place where Rubinsky's female characters learn to navigate the underground secrets at the heart of their emotional lives. It is the place where emotions and rocks share common ground: emotions and "rocks will continue to surface forever. They will keep turning up like *the truth*."

A refusal to listen to the heart, the novel cautions, begins to make one "deaf and dumb and blind against whatever was wrong." But these women do, at last, listen and arrive at the irrevocable "moment of a choice," a turning point. They "wrestle not against flesh and blood but . . . against powers, against the rulers of the darkness in the world": sudden death, adultery, incest, and small-town secrecy. The novel opens with Kathleen's abrupt change from wife to widow: a massive heart attack kills her husband. Lenore is in a "long time marriage falling apart," and her long time passive martyrdom manifests in "intestinal trials": "bowel disease, diverticular disease, or ulcerative colitis." Mory hitchhikes from

Lasqueti Island to Ruth with her eleven-year-old child of incest, the grandson her parents “had never seen,” to face her depraved parents and her sexually abusive father’s imminent death. Lucinda organizes self-awareness workshops at the Centre for Light Awareness but prefers, instead, to exist in the dark. She takes “no chances that cognizance might rear its unwelcome head” on what she is unwilling to admit about her fifteen-year relationship with Gabriel. Davida is in a loveless marriage to a man she claims is “chronically disgruntled” and has the personality of a “pit-bull.” Her assessment, however, is compromised by her secret relationship with Miriam, a woman she loves and whose lifestyle she esteems.

Rubinsky does not structure her novel in a linear narrative. She weaves one character’s story into another’s within the novel. Some of the characters also appear in stories from the author’s first two collections: *At First I Hope for Rescue* (1997) and *Rapid Transits* (1990). Rubinsky’s complex interweaving of narratives holds together in a novel that enacts the importance of stories to a fuller understanding of how and why these women are “interconnected and interdependent.” The novel is preceded by an epigraph from Margaret Atwood’s “The Loneliness of the Military Historian,” and, like the historian in that poem, Rubinsky presents “what [she] hope[s] will pass as truth. / A blunt thing, not lovely. . . . [Her] trade is courage and atrocities. / [She] look[s] at them and [does] not condemn.” Her unflinching eye is an empathetic one, understanding that her characters, in all their complicated humanness, “couldn’t be wholly bad. Meaning that most humans were not found in a clearing.” Hers are characters found in personal, familial, communal, historical contexts that precede them but contexts, nevertheless, in which they “are always complicit.” Rubinsky charts the transitory passage from the familiar to

the unknown with all the struggle and grace that a life truthfully demands. Her characters eventually yield to the unknown: “[t]here was a point beyond which living was intolerable, the point beyond which it was impossible, for instance, to tolerate being a person no one liked, beyond which tolerating your pity for yourself and keeping a stiff upper lip were not simply doable.”

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## Mirroring Madness

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**Joan Clark**

*An Audience of Chairs*. Knopf \$32.95

Reviewed by Jennifer Fraser

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Joan Clark writes transparent prose deceptive in its simplicity, for one barely realizes, being so caught up in the story and the characters, that her words do not form a window into the madness that dominates one woman’s life; rather they form a mirror. Moranna Mackenzie’s madness functions as a foil to the mad moments we all have as children, as siblings, as lovers, as parents. This is what makes *An Audience of Chairs* incredibly powerful and necessary to read.

Near the end of the novel, Moranna turns to the mirror as a fairytale support while she lowers her own voice to speak its wisdom like an oracle: “Don’t forget the MacKenzie courage. Stand your ground. Don’t run away like you did after Bonnie’s lecture. Wait.” Most readers have turned to the mirror to stop themselves from fleeing; most readers have held on to something until their fingers turn white; most readers have become so caught up in something that they forget their responsibilities; and thus, when Moranna turns to this mirror for support, we all want her to hear its truth.

Over the course of the novel, Moranna MacKenzie spends a lifetime trying to come to terms with her mistake as a mother who, while her husband is away for months in Russia working as a journalist, leaves her two young daughters and niece on an island

while she rows back to her house. She is caught up in painting illustrations for a children's book while the girls wait. The sun sets before she pulls out of her creative trance and realizes she has forgotten the children. The serious error causes the husband and extended family to intervene and Moranna suffers a breakdown. She loses her daughters, and yet yearning for them every day, she strives to find a way to return to them. *An Audience of Chairs* records her battle to rediscover her children across the seemingly impossible barriers set up by her husband, by her family, by the doctors, by the lawyers, by time and by space, but mostly by those barriers of her own making. She must develop and adhere to a cure for her own madness if she wants to be with her daughters again.

Joan Clark's exploration of the antidote to madness and its attendant suffering is layered and self-reflexive. She alludes delicately to Shakespeare's characters with small details such as lines that echo Hamlet's grief, wildflower bouquets to recall Ophelia, Richard's mirror. She portrays a mother who almost loses her mind because parenting requires her—during the Cold War years—to relinquish selfhood to the oblivion of the maternal. Moranna's failure results partially from her inability to crush her own needs. She is supported by husband and family in establishing a room of her own where she can be creative while a local girl helps with the children; her daughters find this attic space and join her. The artistic, erratic, scattered mother "didn't shoo them away but looked at them fondly. 'Of course you can make your own books,' she said."

In contrast to this idyllic mothering whereby creative pursuits keep the madness contained and productive, Moranna's breakdown is dominated by writer's block. The "blank space" into which she falls suggests a blank page, and over the course of her life Moranna slowly re-writes herself out of a mental institution, out of social isolation,

out of familial abandonment by carving literally and figuratively an existence so that she can again have the privilege of being a mother to her daughters: "she arranges her carvings in what she imagines are dioramas—a group of clansmen listening to the prophecies of the Brahan Seer, crofters gathered around Catherine's chair watching her roof burn, Pioneer Big Ian and Henrietta standing on the Sydney wharf." The only figures from her Scottish heritage Moranna never carves are the children: she seeks the girls she lost as individuals in the world, not as figments of her imaginative pursuits.

Ultimately, *An Audience of Chairs* describes the theatre of the mind where Moranna, like all of us, must take responsibility for the role she plays.

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## Fear Factor

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**Eden Robinson**

*Blood Sports*. McClelland & Stewart \$32.99

Reviewed by Laurie Kruk

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Eden Robinson is a scary writer—not of the horror form, although she declares herself an admirer of early Stephen King. Her scariness lies in her relentless pursuit of the cat-and-mouse games of the sociopathic and criminalized and in her tendency to find dark humour within this urban grotesquerie. *Blood Sports* is her third book, following on the highly successful collection of stories, *Traplines*, and her 2000 novel, *Monkey Beach*, shortlisted for both the Giller Prize and Governor General's Award. *Blood Sports* actually expands upon *Traplines*' "Contact Sports." Its title encapsulates competing aspects of this work—viscerally shocking conflicts which yet appear part of a game played by young adults still working through growing-up rebellions while starting independent lives. An acknowledgements page includes Robinson's defiant disclaimer, "Made the Whole Thing Up," in which she professes, like Margaret Atwood, to prefer

“the older, bloodier versions of fairy tales” and that *Blood Sports* “is an homage to the original *Hansel and Gretel*.” She herself labels the book a “dark fantasy” but with its gang-land drama of betrayal, murder, and life-is-cheap philosophy, it reflects gritty realism as well as possessing a cinematic, action-packed energy.

Set in Vancouver’s transgressive Downtown Eastside, *Blood Sports* entwines the desires, deceits, and dysfunctions of three young people: epileptic, sensitive Tom Bauer; his sociopathic cousin Jeremy; tough former addict Paulina (Paulie), once Jeremy’s lover, now Tom’s partner and co-parent to their toddler, Melody. As in the fairy tale, Tom and Paulie appear lost in the witch’s woods. Tom’s knowledge of Jeremy’s drug-dealing schemes, and some casual acts of theft, bring on a terrifying punishment which we experience through Tom’s eyes over five days of present-time action, broken up by glimpses of the cousins’ backstory. Past is thus juxtaposed with present, offering different takes on the main characters’ complicated motivations (if anything, some of this re-contextualizing could be trimmed).

Tom is the book’s central consciousness, and he remains Jeremy’s obsessive focus as his claimed “brother,” a reluctant pupil in Jeremy’s school of hard knocks. The novel begins with Tom’s letter to his abandoned daughter, suggestively post-kidnapping, in a mini-autobiography called “Aura”: “When Daddy freezes up, that first seizure is called an aura. Not the New-Age you-must-be-angry-because-you-have-a-lot-of-red-in-your-halo aura, but a sensory seizure. When it starts, I feel it in my stomach, like I’m seasick. Then it changes. You know that feeling you get after you’ve watched a scary movie late at night, alone, and you know no one’s in the house with you. It’s just your imagination but you can’t stop being scared anyway.” Tom’s seizures—like Jeremy’s obsessive use of videotaping to intimidate, record, control; like Paulie’s half-dreamed letters

from her Rehab Center—aptly reflect his damaged, dangerous world. Yet it is not just the younger generation that appears lost—Tom’s mother neglects him for drinking nights and pickups, while Paulie’s parents are closet alcoholics who refuse to have anything to do with their granddaughter. Jeremy’s mother, who is named Faith, remains a mystery, not surprisingly, in this world.

Robinson is most effective at creating up-to-the-minute dialogue. Tom’s voice—sarcastic, witty, wounded—dominates the book. She uses the casual second-person “you” to place us powerfully in Tom’s perspective in “Roll”: “You are on the floor in the upstairs room of a rundown house. Handcuffs pin your wrists behind your back. Your fingers fall asleep under the combined weight of your body and Jeremy’s as Jeremy straddles your waist. . . . ‘Did you think you could get away with it?’ Jeremy says.” Tom is in the victimized position for most of this game. If anything, he is too unremittingly punished—by his epilepsy, by his abandoning mother, by Jeremy, by Paulie, by the kidnapping thugs—to permit much sense of this mistreatment as his “Penance” (the title of part eight). Only in Paulie’s and Tom’s commitment to raise Melody, their unexpected child, is there any real sense of hope. As in the fairytale, the two “children,” working together, manage to escape one oven—but do they get home safely? The game ends with one final lesson from Jeremy, one which seems to remove Tom from his fragile new family.

Robinson proudly identifies herself as a Haisla woman, raised 500 miles north of Vancouver. She has been celebrated as an up-and-coming Native Canadian writer, yet it is interesting that two of her three works have no obvious Native characters or themes. Perhaps, as with other Canadian writers, it is Robinson’s outsider perspective that sparks such intense engagement with these troubled urban youth. Key markers of identity



here are class, gender, and degree of addiction—to drugs (Paulie), to power (Jeremy), to his own family loyalties (Tom). Robinson's ability to probe these identity conflicts, and evoke twenty-first century Canada's fear factor, is scary indeed.

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## Classical Riffs

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**Mark Frutkin**

*Fabrizio's Return*. Knopf Canada \$29.95

Reviewed by Norman Ravvin

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Mark Frutkin's novel, *Fabrizio's Return*, is a fantasia on a number of themes key to post-Renaissance high culture. Set partly in the late seventeenth century, but for the most part in mid-eighteenth century Italy, its narrative turns on such questions as the meaning of sainthood, the challenge of science to faith, the ability of art—both visual and dramatic—to reveal truths about our lives, and it even briefly addresses the subject of crypto-Judaism. Though these are notably weighty issues, which allow Frutkin to frame his story with portraits of ecclesiastical, noble and artistic power, the novel's tone is light. It is told from a number of points of view, and makes effective use of dialogue to drive its action along.

The narrative's two key figures are a would-be saint, Fabrizio Cambiati, and Michele Archenti, a Jesuit and "devil's advocate," who is sent from Rome, decades after Fabrizio's death, to investigate his worth as a miracle worker and a model for the Church. The townspeople of Cremona are awash in stories of Cambiati's saintly powers: "They said his left hand sparkled and gave off rays of light, that the candles in the church lit themselves when he passed. Once, it was said, he was praying in the cathedral and Christ stepped down from the cross and took his hand."

*Fabrizio's Return* offers a lightly sketched social history of Christian Italy, but the narrative is more of a romp than a study of

Church history. It makes use of magic realist flourishes—figures appear and vanish in flashes of light and mist—and romance breaks out in unruly ways. Fabrizio's town, Cremona, is ruled by an imperious Duke, whose daughter, Elletra, fills the role of the young idealistic lover whose transgressions endanger both herself and her beloved. One can feel the influence of Shakespeare and the comedies of his contemporaries on the narrative. Fabrizio and "his manservant" Omero concoct failed alchemical experiments in their lab; a side narrative, enacted by a "family of *commedia dell'arte* players," rings of groundling fare, inserted both as light relief and to mirror the central action.

Frutkin mounts a modest critique of the Vatican at the mid-point of the 1700s. The death of Pope Benedict XIV leads to the investiture of Clement XIII of Venice. The back-room dealings related to this transfer of authority endanger the Jesuits, and Archenti is betrayed by a man he considers to be his friend in Rome. A pair of itinerant figures—one a Hieronymite priest, the other a murderer who has done lengthy penitence for his crime—operate as voices of conscience and prophecy in contradiction to official corruption. Archenti's downfall within the Church is interpreted indirectly by the lessons he learns from these haunting figures. And the discovery of his own compromised ancestry places him in an even more ambiguous position.

Reflecting Frutkin's three collections of poetry, *Fabrizio's Return* is a novel of lambent light, of wordplay, and of characters portrayed in painterly scenarios: "By the end of the long day's interrogatory, after the *duchessa* had left, the devil's advocate felt he was not closer to the truth than before. He stood at the window of his room, gazing out over the roofs of the city. Again the sun was hidden above the grey, though the clouds were imbued with a faint golden glow, and the few streaks of falling rain seemed edged in gold."

The author's poetic flourishes uniquely stamp archetypal materials—both characters and narrative strategies—that we recognize from other literary sources. It is refreshing, in a novel of high drama, which takes aim at weighty questions of faith and fate, that the author manages to keep things light. Whether Fabrizio is a saint or not, he is a comic figure, at once mysterious and likeable.

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## When You See the Land...

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**Melody Hessing, Rebecca Raglon, and Catriona Sandilands, eds.**

*This Elusive Land: Women and the Canadian Environment.* UBC Press \$34.95

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Reviewed by Lisa Sara Szabo

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Ecofeminism originates in grass roots ecological women's movements that seek to recognize and amend gendered social and environmental injustices. Social and environmental injustices, though inextricably interconnected, are loose terms that, like ecofeminists' diverse theoretical approaches, encompass issues as varied as agricultural practices, conservation models, health issues, economic and political policies, toxic contamination, gendered and racist literary and historical representations, and the tensions between domestic and wilderness spaces. Addressing issues about women, wilderness, nature, and environment, *This Elusive Land: Women and the Canadian Environment* traces the shaping of Canadian environmental concerns through narratives and matters that have been historically situated as marginal accounts, especially in such areas as literary, scientific and historical contributions, political and environmental grass roots efforts, health, and work. The de-emphasis is appropriately implied by the parenthetical enclosure of the anthology's epigraph "(precede me into this elusive country) / always this place, this latitude escapes me." Gwendolyn MacEwen's "The Caravan" fittingly encapsulates and reminds us of women's under-representation,

and "this elusive country" within the same parenthesis particularly emphasizes under-acknowledgement of women in relation to the land. The epigraph reminds us of the necessity to reorient traditionally male stories (historic, literary, economic and political) that have gendered perceptions of Canada's environment and of women's experience and place within this land to create a sustainable, healthy, and just change within Canada.

*This Elusive Land* is an important text as an introduction to both ecofeminist theory and women's representation (or under-representation) in environmental and social politics in Canada. The contributors' backgrounds are diverse: anthropology, environmental studies, literature, history, geography, community and regional planning, sociology, women's studies, conservation and landscape architecture, and environmental policy and management. Multidisciplinary coupled with varied ecofeminist positions are what make *This Elusive Land* a particularly strong collection. The authors challenge gendered assumptions and illustrate the ongoing obstacles in overcoming historically engrained male-biased narratives and policy-making. Though one may be tempted to dip into this collection and select particular articles, I recommend reading *This Elusive Land* in its entirety from beginning to end. Divided into four parts—"Explorers and Settlers," "Making a Living: Making a Life," "Environmental Politics: Issues at Home and Away," and "Rethinking the Environment"—the anthology engenders a sense of a continuous, unfolding narrative. The introduction effectively demonstrates that the treatment of women and of the environment cannot be examined separately, and the essays together demonstrate contributor Heather Eaton's observation that "there is an indelible connection between the suffering of women and the wreckage of the earth," a connection that permeates and affects every aspect of women's lives.

Too many essays stand out in this collection to cover them all in sufficient detail. Rebecca Raglon reassesses the ecocritical and literary value of Catharine Parr Traill's natural history writings, providing a reading that successfully challenges "a contemporary bias that deems writing about nature to be less interesting than work that deals with the human comedy." Catriona Sandilands' "Where the Mountain Men Meet the Lesbian Ranger: Gender, Nation, and Nature in Rocky Mountain National Parks" explores gendered tensions between wilderness and domesticity as nation-building models, and the subsequent erasure of First Nations culture and de-emphasis of women in non-domestic roles in the historical and enduring representation of Canada's Rocky Mountain national parks as empty, "wild and masculine spaces." Correspondingly, Randall Roorda maintains that the "wilderness wife" genre demonstrates how labour division is influenced by "a domestic economy . . . based on mutual reliance." Daniel O'Leary provides a perceptive analysis of Agnes Deans Cameron's androgynous narrative voice, and her contributions to conservation. Melody Hessing's "The Fall of the Wild? Feminist Perspectives of Canadian Wilderness Protection" arguably functions as the umbrella chapter of the anthology. Though Hessing's essay provides a comprehensive analysis of gendered conservation methods in Canada, she provides a theoretical discussion about wilderness and domesticity that complements many of the specialized case studies of the collection.

The collection includes fascinating regional case studies, which illustrate that as both income earners and domestic caretakers women suffer the greatest losses. The chapters focusing on regional resource-based industries and towns could be about women anywhere in Canada: the subsequent economic, familial, and mental and physical health struggles that befall women are glaring indictments of government policies and

gendered public opinion which continue to classify women as lower in priority than men. Other significant essays are Maureen G. Reed's analysis of the economic and gendered injustices prevalent in British Columbia's forestry industry, Sherilyn MacGregor's research of the struggles and the limitations Ontario women encounter in "Quality-of-Life" activism, Jo-Anne Fiske's "And the Young Man Did Go North (Unfortunately): Reflections on Issues in Gender and the Academy," and Barbara Neis and Brenda Grzetic's chapter about Newfoundland's women fish-processing workers. Offsetting these case studies are inspiring stories of women's local efforts to create meaningful and sustainable communities, such as Katherine Dunster's guide to community (re)mapping as political protest.

One of the aims of the anthology is to "fill a gap in our knowledge of women and the environment of Canada," an ambitious objective, since what this collection highlights is the breadth of this gap; however, it remains a goal that would encourage a continued (and welcome) series. *This Elusive Land* signals the growing population of women and men devoted to initiating change as a *community* effort and shows that local movements are effective strategies for countering global problems. Yet, the anthology also fosters a cross-border community, for as the transcultural comparison in "Desperately Seeking Sisterhood and Sustainability" and Kathryn Harrison's investigation of dioxin contamination demonstrate, many of the problems addressed in this collection are endemic worldwide. The last section features Marian Scholtmeijer's, Heather Eaton's, Anne L. Kaufman's and Melody Hessing's alternative frameworks that embrace feminine eroticism, spirituality, "gendered remediation," and First Nations women writers' conveyance of language's power to affect human relationships and the well-being of a listening natural world. *This Elusive Land* will remain a

valuable text as one of the first in Canada to bring together a variety of voices and methods on issues pertaining to women, ecology and the Canadian environment.

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## Canadian SF

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**Élisabeth Vonarburg**

*A Game of Perfection.* EDGE \$20.95

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**Danita Maslan**

*Rogue Harvest.* Robert J Sawyer Books \$26.95

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**Tanya Huff**

*Stealing Magic.* EDGE \$16.95

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Reviewed by Douglas Barbour

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Whether or not there is actually something clearly definable as Canadian science fiction, there do seem to be some markers. One of them is a tendency to set up interesting metaphysical situations in the stories told, and one of the best at doing so is Élisabeth Vonarburg, who has been creating astonishingly complex other worlds for nearly three decades.

*A Game of Perfection* is the second volume of what will surely be her masterwork, The Tyranaël Series, and although it does stand alone, I'd recommend reading *Dreams of the Sea* first. In that novel, Vonarburg introduced the planet Tyranaël. One of two planets circling Altair, Tyranaël was once home to an Ancient race. Their many cities and artefacts seem to have been waiting for colonists from Earth to arrive and discover the enigmatic civilization long dispersed from the planet humans name Virginia. But the first expedition ran into trouble when a mysterious Sea suddenly appeared, killing any person beneath its surface. Of no substance known to Terran science, it appears and disappears twice a Virginian year. Yet, given the way humanity has nearly destroyed Earth's environment, colonization must go on. In *Dreams of the Sea*, an Ancient Dreamer narrates most of the interconnected stories, those of her own people and her visions of the colonists from Earth and their difficulties,

both with the new environment of Tyranaël and the continuing control from Earth.

In *A Game of Perfection*, Vonarburg offers only a few slight glimpses of the Ancients, as she turns to tell a multi-generational tale of the rather fast evolution of ESP forced upon humans by the Sea and various Ancient technological artefacts. Simon Rossem, the most powerful telepath of a strongly psychic family, is central to this story of social and cultural change. A kind of hidden philosopher-king, who for some reason unknown to him keeps being re-born, he helps to form various networks of Others, to get them working for the independence of Virginia and to somehow acclimatize humanity to Tyranaël's unique ecology. Of course, things do not work out exactly as he plans, and Vonarburg creates a multifaceted collection of other players with whom he has to deal. *A Game of Perfection* is both philosophical and social SF at its best.

A more direct form of science-centered fiction has long been associated with Robert J. Sawyer, who now edits an SF line from Red Deer Press. Danita Maslan's first novel, *Rogue Harvest*, presents a world almost lost to ecological destruction and plague, which has slowly recovered under the chosen draconian rule of the Emerald Coalition. That political party has hired EcoTech to replenish all the ruined areas of the world, replacing their original habitats, while Green Splinter warriors back up first the early removal of people from all the preserves to cities and then prevent anyone from returning.

When her adoptive father is murdered for his political arguments that the preserves should be opened, if only slightly, to scientists and others, Jasmine Rochelle hires a smart mover from the Core to help her track down the killer. Before long, they have discovered that the murder and its cover up are actually concealing something much larger. Jasmine wants to help her medical researcher adoptive brother find a cure for a terrible new disease, using the VJX mold

from the South American preserve. Before long she and her partner, Mane, are seeking a way to enter the preserve without damaging it the way other smugglers do. All of which sets up a taut thriller, in which there are few obvious good or bad guys. The leaders of the Emerald Coalition truly believe that the preserves must be kept absolutely empty of any human interaction, especially as EcoTech keeps telling them that. But, as Jasmine and her little corps of scientists are discovering, the new forest is not as absolutely pure as it is said to be; somehow or other, a few previously unknown species have grown there.

In fact, it is this secret that EcoTech is determined to keep, even if it has to sanction murder, beatings, and other forms of political violence. Jasmine and her crew, and her friends in the music business, might upset this and so must be stopped. Maslan has put together a finely tuned future political thriller in *Rogue Harvest*. It's a good solid entertainment with an ecological warning we should all take seriously.

Tanya Huff's *Stealing Magic* is something else, a delightful *jeu d'esprit* in which the comedy always inheres in the narratives rather than being forced upon them. This new expanded edition also pays homage to the old Ace Doubles by having her thief stories on one side and her wizard stories on the other. Given the way so many tales of powerful mages can somehow sink into mad paranoid visions of world domination, Huff's decision to make "the most powerful wizard in the world" a remarkably lazy, sensual woman is the first of many nifty twists in the tales of Magdeline that make up one side of *Stealing Magic*. The fun in these stories depends upon Magdeline's very real distaste for hard work, and Huff's sure knowledge of, and delight in puncturing, the superfluous conventions of much magic fiction. When necessary, Magdeline uses her magical powers, but she'd much rather find another lover, eat well, and generally laze about. Nevertheless, a number of baddies, including

some demon princes, come to harm when they underestimate an apparently weak woman's powers.

The stories on the other side of *Stealing Magic* concern the somewhat more difficult life of Terazin, the best thief in the city of Oreen if not the world. Also tales of the biter bit, they are more complicated, and their characterizations stronger. Huff's style is nicely straight-faced. And rather than crude puns, the situations build and generate the humour in these stories. *Stealing Magic* does not pretend to any great weight or depth, but it offers sure-fire entertainment, always with a flourish.

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## Of Note

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### Yann Martel

*The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios.*

Vintage \$21.00

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This collection of Yann Martel's short stories preceded the publication of his highly-acclaimed novel, *Life of Pi*. Reprinted by Vintage, the four stories in the collection each present a figure who is witness to what is either a traumatic or highly moving event; in this sense, the stories anticipate the narrator of *Life of Pi* and his radical transformation, the result of his own distressing circumstances.

The narrator of "The Facts Behind the Helsinki Roccamatios" is witness to his friend's rapid deterioration after being diagnosed with AIDS; that of "The Time I Heard the Private Donald J. Ranking String Concerto with One Discordant Violin, by the American Composer John Morton" to Morton's sublime rendering of a musical composition; that of "Manners of Dying" to Kevin Barlow's execution(s); and that of "The Vita Aeterna Mirror Company: Mirrors to Last till Kingdom Come" to his

grandmother's life story, compressed into a mirror (which offers an interesting range of interpretative possibilities). These narrators are significantly altered by the experience to which they are spectators: the witness, as its etymology suggests, both *sees* the traumatic experience and feels obliged to *speak* of it, as each narrator does.

As Martel observes in the "Author's Note," these are the "best results of [his] early years as a writer." He understates the case: these stories, to my mind, surpass the novel in literary achievement and experimentation. They reveal his aesthetic inventiveness, his sheer sense of play with the genre, which demonstrates a remarkable adeptness and richness of mind. — LINDA MORRA

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**Conny Steenman-Marcusse**

*Re-Writing Pioneer Women in Anglo-Canadian Literature.* Rodopi \$43.00

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In an extensive study of the first novels of prominent Canadian writers Carol Shields (*Small Ceremonies*), Daphne Marlatt (*Ana Historic*), and Susan Swan (*The Biggest Modern Woman of the World*), Conny Steenman-Marcusse examines the appearance of "real-life" pioneer foremothers in contemporary Canadian fiction by women from a post-modern, postcolonial, and feminist perspective. From the vantage point of Europe, this Dutch study of English Canadian literature relates Canadian women's search for identity with the search for Canadian national identity. Steenman-Marcusse theorizes that the experience of women within the country's patriarchal social structure is similar to Canada's colonial experience as subordinate to Britain. Furthermore, she suggests that the search for identity may apply to authors of any ethnic culture, class, or sexual minority within the multicultural Canadian experience.

The first part of this book is devoted to a discussion of postcolonialism, postmodernism, feminism, Canadian identity, and significant historical events that

defined the country from the Dominion Act of 1867 to the Multiculturalism Act of 1982. Marcusse contends, "The influence of the other . . . shapes the identity of the self. The "other" can take various forms, ranging from land and cityscape to nations and different categories of people. Assertion of the self, both in the case of Canadians and in the case of women, is a relatively new phenomenon. Canadians were and still are extended Europeans, Africans, Asians, but hardly ever *only* Canadians. This in her view, is one of the principal differences between Canada and the US; whereas immigrants to the United States are encouraged to leave the old country behind them, immigrants to Canada are encouraged to retain their ties to language and culture of origin. Throughout, Marcusse demonstrates a solid grasp of the events, attitudes, and the literature that shaped the nation, and of its women's struggle for voice. When it comes to differences between male and female writers, Marcusse suggests that "there is one clear difference in the position of men and women as writers. Across time and cultures women have had to operate against the grain of greater or lesser male prejudice and hostility."

— JUDITH CRICHTON

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**Christopher Dewdney**

*Acquainted with the Night: Excursions Through the World After Dark.* HarperCollins \$34.95

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Like many among the young, black-clad, and Gothically inclined, I once tried to write a vampire novel. Since it had a contemporary setting, I was forced to realize that it was no longer unusual to go about at night. An increasing number of jobs require it, rendering the vampire's life no longer so singular, nor necessarily so lonely.

Christopher Dewdney's extended meditation on the night begins with an anecdote of a small boy creeping into the moonlit, partly wooded backyard of his family home,

while everyone else was sleeping and unaware, as if climbing through a portal to a secondary world. To our news-numbed sensibilities, this might bring a thrill of horror, and yet the memory sets the tone for the book, in which Dewdney quickly claims the impossibility of a satisfactory formal definition of night beyond "the concept of periodic darkness" and so sets out to explore that concept as if both he, and his audience, were alien beings to whom it is wholly new.

To this project, he brings his skills as scientist, philosopher, cultural observer, and poet, fusing them in a work that recalls the sort of extended meditation of classical scholarship, and yet with a less assured sense of audience. The book ranges so vastly there is almost something for everyone, and indeed, while it rewards a sustained, chronological reading, it also lends itself to brief random encounters. This adaptability is appropriate, for while the periodic darkness is a function of cosmology, the notion of time is to a great extent an arbitrary artifice.

The book is divided into 14 chapters. Two serve as bookends; the remaining let each hour, from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., permit exploration of a different aspect of night, including (in random order) the physiology of sleep, dreams, bedtime stories, urban night-life, night-inspired culture (from the Gothic tale to film noir), nocturnal creatures both real and imaginary, stargazing, insomnia, light pollution, the night shift. While the sheer breadth of detail and reference might suggest a superficial overview, Dewdney makes no pretense of scholarly ambition. Ultimately, this is a poet's view, provoking consideration through its elegant turns of phrase and image. I am reminded of Louis in *Interview with the Vampire*, lamenting his inability to see the landscapes he imagined in the brilliance of daylight. Is Louis' failure to revel in his night vision tragic, or does appreciation of the night depend on knowledge of the day?

The lure of *Acquainted with the Night* is

that it provokes such questions, and perhaps supplies an answer: "Night gives us permission to hope, to wish, to dream, to be whom-ever we wish. And beyond the city lights there is a wild night in the country, where fragrant foliage frames the long, dazzled streak of a rising moon reflected on water."

— GISELE M. BAXTER

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### André Désilets

*Les Tensions de l'errance*. Presses de l'Université Laval 15,00 \$

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Ce livre retrace la survivance de la tradition spirituelle chez quatre philosophes de notre temps (Alexis Klimov, Rodrigue LaRue, Jean Brun, Olivier Clément) et le peintre canadien Jacques Janelle, puisque l'art, ici, ne se sépare pas de la spiritualité. L'ouvrage a le mérite de présenter clairement ces penseurs injustement méconnus. À travers ce qui les unifie, le commentateur dégage une vision critique du monde moderne dont le désarroi appelle au secours. Tout au long, l'auteur fustige l'époque qui ne cesse de s'appauvrir. Suivant Brun, il croit même à un Mal radical enraciné au plus profond de la vie, Mal dont même la philosophie, si elle peut en parler, reste incapable de nous délivrer. Les solutions proposées ne peuvent donc pas être philosophiques, elles sont encore moins scientifiques, les sciences étant incapables de donner un sens à la vie. Elles ne sont pas non plus politiques, économiques ou sociologiques. Elles sont spirituelles, métaphysiques, voire religieuses (évangéliques). Pour Désilets, avoir la foi est essentiel et l'homme se nourrit de la parole de Dieu. Tout est simple pour lui, qui reprend la formule des Pères de l'Église: « Les oiseaux volent, les poissons nagent et les hommes prient. » Il invite à fuir la raison comme moyen d'investigation et de compréhension: « ce n'est pas auprès d'elle qu'il faut chercher la vérité ». Il lui attribue même les pires catastrophes, comme si la religion, son contrepoint salutaire, n'avait

pas ensanglanté la terre à maintes reprises à travers l'histoire. On peut, certes, facilement adhérer à ses propos contre la robotisation de la vie, la chosification de l'être humain, le dessèchement de l'esprit, la société de consommation et la médiocrité existentielle, mais pour transcender ces écueils suffit-il d'écouter les fous de Dieu, comme il nous y invite? Comment est-ce même possible après le 11 septembre 2001 ou au vu des théocraties qui terrorisent le monde actuel et le plongent dans un obscurantisme extrêmement dangereux? La solution ne réside-t-elle pas plutôt dans la lucidité la plus vigilante contre toutes les formes d'obscurantisme?

— GAËTAN BRULOTTE

### Jacques Poulin

*La Traduction est une histoire d'amour.* Leméac  
15,95 \$

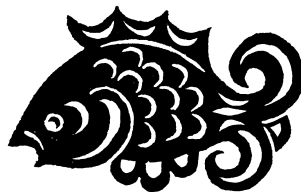
Tout en accueillant son lecteur dans le confort et la tendresse d'un monde très familier, le nouveau roman de Jacques Poulin, *La Traduction est une histoire d'amour*, lui réserve malgré tout quelques surprises. Certes, on y retrouve un style dépouillé, l'amour des mots, des livres et des chats, une certaine chaleur humaine, un romancier québécois dont le nom de plume est Jack Waterman, des références aux dictionnaires et à plusieurs écrivains, dont Ernest Hemingway et Gabrielle Roy, ainsi que la présence d'une jeune femme « liseuse » qui rappelle à la fois Marie (la nageuse des *Grandes Marées*) et la Grande Sauterelle (la nomade de *Volkswagen Blues*).

Nonobstant cet aspect de déjà-vu, ce petit texte d'une lecture rapide et agréable présente quelques éléments inattendus. Tout d'abord, remarquons qu'à la place de l'habituel narrateur omniscient ou du romancier-narrateur, le narrateur (ou plutôt la narratrice), pour la toute première fois dans les romans pouliniens, est une jeune femme. Or il ne s'agit pas de n'importe quelle jeune femme.

Il s'agit d'une lectrice qui, comme Teddy Bear (*Les Grandes marées*), pratique la traduction. Qui plus est, Marine (ou Maureen) se donne comme tâche de traduire en anglais le livre sur la Piste de l'Oregon de Jack Waterman, un monsieur de deux fois son âge, frêle, cardiaque et bienveillant. Il importe de remarquer aussi que Marine est d'origine irlandaise du côté maternel et que ces origines, comme celles de la Métisse dans *Volkswagen Blues*, rappellent l'histoire l'arrivée en Amérique des immigrants irlandais chassés de leur pays natal par la famine. D'ailleurs, sur la couverture du roman, la « Jeune femme aux cheveux roux » de Toulouse-Lautrec offre en premier une image de Marine, cette orpheline aux cheveux roux, aux yeux verts et aux taches de rousseur dont la mère irlandaise a succombé au cancer et la sœur à la dépression.

Comme d'autres protagonistes enclins au suspense et à la quête (voir *Volkswagen Blues*, *Le Vieux chagrin*), les « zouaves » de cette histoire d'amour ne tardent pas à déchiffrer les signes les conduisant sur la piste d'une jeune fille en détresse et d'une vieille femme malade munie d'un revolver. Et tout cela est amorcé par l'arrivée sur l'île d'Orléans de Famine, un petit chat noir abandonné, porteur d'un message obscur.

Si la familiarité et la surprise sont devenues désormais les marques de l'écriture romanesque de Poulin, il est évident que *La Traduction est une histoire d'amour* ne dévie pas de ce modèle ; et le lecteur de Poulin continue de le lire comme il rendrait visite à la parenté, autant pour retrouver un monde familier que pour découvrir ce qu'il y a de nouveau. — ANNE MARIE MIRAGLIA





## State Censorship and Irene Baird's *Waste Heritage*

Jody Mason

Perhaps because it has been out of print for so long, literary critics have paid little attention to Irene Baird's 1939 novel *Waste Heritage*. Despite the materialist orientation of the criticism that does exist, there is as yet no significant study of the publishing history of Baird's novel. I have turned up a narrative that will both begin to redress the lack of bibliographical work on the novel and contribute to thinking about the interrelation of political and artistic activity in the interwar period.

A review of the first edition of *Waste Heritage* by Margaret Wallace in the New York-based *Saturday Review of Literature* offers a bibliographical detail that I had not encountered in any Baird criticism: Wallace notes that the "action of the Canadian publishers in omitting certain passages" indicates that the novel "is expected to evoke a profound response, at least in Canada" (7). Indeed, the novel represents an explosive event, the troubling effects of which remained fresh in the minds of Canadians in 1939: the Vancouver sit-down strike of more than one thousand transients protesting the provincial and federal governments' inability or unwillingness to formulate a permanent strategy for dealing with a decade of severe unemployment. Despite the novel's specific setting, it appeared simultaneously in the United States (with Random House)

and Canada (with Macmillan) in 1939. Hugh Eayrs of Macmillan sold the printed sheets to Bab Haas at Random House; the sale means that only one edition was (supposedly) produced, since both came from a single setting of type. Indeed, the spelling is consistent throughout the edition (US spelling is favoured) and the only readily apparent difference is the title page, which features different imprints. The Macmillan fonds at McMaster University, however, enabled me to discover how a single edition appeared in different forms in Canada and the US.

The readers' reports and the correspondence between Hugh Eayrs and Baird's agent reveal that the subject matter of the novel created some trepidation on the part of the publisher as well as the author and, indeed, indicate the close association of art and state party politics in this period. In his initial reader's report, Carl Eayrs of Macmillan (former labour editor for the *Toronto Evening Telegram*) reported to his brother, Hugh Eayrs, that Baird's manuscript was powerful enough to impact the impending federal election:

What I'm getting at is that if this is published before the election it can become a powerful weapon in the hands of Manion and the Conservative party. I'm not exaggerating when I say that. Even if the novel only reflected on the B.C., [sic] Government, whih [sic] is Liberal, it would help the Tories, but it is also a reflection of the Federal Government. Whether you or I think they could have done anything is beside the point. That novel is dynamite, becausee [sic] it's so powerful and because

it portrays conditions so truthfully. A good many people are going to ask, after reading it, why King allows a condition to exist where the unemployed and the youth of the country appear to have no future. (C. Eayrs to H. Eayrs 1, 1939)

Carl Eayrs avoided calling Baird's novel libelous, but his tone is clearly cautionary. Despite the strong reservations articulated in this report, Macmillan decided to offer Baird a contract. Yet Hugh Eayrs must have heeded the warning because the 1939 contract that he offered to Baird, via her New York agent Marion Saunders, included a libel clause that the agent found unusual. Saunders expressed concern and stated the necessity of protecting Baird, whom she represented as entirely willing to accept editorial changes: "I also hope that you will watch over any statement or reference to an existing condition in this novel of Canadian sit-down strikes, as the author is quite inexperienced in such matters and has no money for libel suits" (Saunders to H. Eayrs, 2 June 1939). In response, Eayrs agreed to have the novel combed "for any possibility of libel" (Saunders to H. Eayrs, 9 June 1939). In Carl Eayrs' second report, which is undated but which appears to have been written in response to Hugh Eayrs' promise to Saunders, Carl was much less concerned about the potential political impact of the novel. He concluded that although the novel was "critical of the Government," it was not aimed "at undermining constitutional authority" and was, in fact, "anti-Red" (C. Eayrs to H. Eayrs 2, 1939). As a result, the novel was edited but none of these initial changes amended the potentially subversive content of Baird's work.

The issue of substantive alterations did not, in fact, arise until November of 1939, just as the Canadian edition was about to go to print and just after Canada had joined other Commonwealth countries in declaring war on Germany. In a panicked letter to Baird, Hugh Eayrs informed her that he

would have to excise sections that were likely to be interpreted as seditious in light of the Defence of Canada Regulations, which were implemented in September of 1939. These regulations barred the printing and distribution of documents likely to "cause disaffection to His Majesty or to interfere with the success of His Majesty's forces or of the forces of any allied or associated Powers or to prejudice His Majesty's relations with foreign powers" or to "prejudice the recruiting, training, discipline, or administration of any of His Majesty's forces" (44). The Regulations, which the federal government made public in September of 1939, were intended to act as supplementary clauses to the existing War Measures Act. In his letter to Baird, Eayrs suggested three changes, all of which appear in the Canadian edition but not in the US edition because the final printed sheets had already been shipped to Random House in late October of 1939. The changes were not important for the US edition anyway, since the US had not yet declared war (and would not do so for another two years), and thus Random House faced no specific wartime censorship.

The excisions respond directly to the prohibitions of the Defence of Canada Regulations; in particular, any reference to the hypocrisy of the government's recruitment efforts was removed. In every case, the changes were made such that no additional lines and very few additional letters were added to the text. On pages six and seven of the US edition, the dialogue between Harry, a café owner in Vancouver and Matt, one of the strikers and the novel's protagonist, is as follows: "Seems like the country's waitin' for Hitler to give you boys a job so you can all be heroes overnight." "Sure, an, get blown to hell an' damnation in the morning! That's one job I don't take. If we was a bunch of beef cattle at least we'd get gov'ment grading." In the Canadian edition, the rhetoric of the latter sentence is much softer and less

militant: "Yeah? An' where do we wake up the next mornin'? I asked guys that an' they just look at me. Maybe I didn't ask the right guys" (6-7). The former sentence, which refers to Hitler as an employer, appears minus the reference to Hitler. Old Man Morgan's ironic reference to the strikers as "a bunch of Nazis" was altered to read "What is it then? Mickey Mouse in person?" (166). In the original passage, Morgan mocks the idea that the strikers have any power by suggesting that "we could use a few Nazis around here." In order to avoid implying that the Nazis *do* have power, the passage was changed such that the strikers become "Mickey Mouse," a laughable figure who should not cause fear. Finally, later in the novel, Matt's letter to his girlfriend Hazel initially read: "I don't belong in the country unless they have a war and want to shove a gun in my hand. Well Hazel maybe if that's all they have to offer I won't wait for a war. I'm not dead but I ought to be. They got no place to put me alive" (261). In the Canadian edition, the tone is much less strident and the reference to recruitment is omitted: "I don't belong in the country unless there is some kind of a big bust-up overseas in which case I guess the authorities will quit wondering what province we belong in just so long as we can do the work. The way some guys is talking that don't sound far off" (261).

As this archival evidence demonstrates, Baird was fearful of libel charges even before the spectre of censorship arose. Unsurprisingly, therefore, Baird willingly accepted the changes Eayrs forcefully suggested. Moreover, unlike artists such as Oscar Ryan and E. Cecil-Smith, Baird was not allied with left-wing or Communist politics and, like many politically moderate Canadians on the eve of World War II, was likely convinced by the non-partisan, "transcendent values" of the nation that the King government invoked in response to perceived security threats (Whitaker 23). In any case, her agreement was ultimately necessary to

the novel's publication: on 21 November, 1939, Hugh Eayrs wrote to a representative of Random House to inform him that changes to the Canadian edition had to go ahead because of "a private tip from the highest possible circles that it was either that or the book wouldn't come out" (H. Eayrs to Cerf). What is surprising is that Macmillan was willing to assume the risk of publishing Baird's novel, especially after war had broken out in Europe and the domestic politics of the Depression were losing their urgency.

Though the discovery of the state's censorship of *Waste Heritage* and Baird's acquiescence to this censorship may not be wholly unexpected given the political climate of 1939, such archival evidence might lead scholars to reconsider an author and a novel that deserve more critical attention. The publication history of *Waste Heritage*, for example, might contribute to the reconsideration of Baird's relation as a middle-class woman to the politically incendiary novel that was forgotten in the maelstrom of war.<sup>1</sup> More broadly, the archival evidence lends new insight into the role of art in the fragile historical moment between the social, political, and economic crises of the Depression and the Second World War.

#### NOTE

- 1 In "Sidown, Brothers, Sidown," a 1976 article in which she reflects on the process of writing *Waste Heritage*, Baird emphatically distinguishes herself from Communism and radical politics but defends her decision to neither "praise or condemn" the actions of the strikers and their Communist-affiliated leaders (82).

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## Two Commentaries

### 1. Travelling in Indian Country

Margery Fee

Renate Eigenbrod's book *Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Im/migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada* (U of Manitoba P \$24.95) is based not only on her extensive reading of Aboriginal literatures, but also on her teaching experience since 1986. As her title makes clear, a major concern is to situate herself in the ongoing conversation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. Making constant reference to Aboriginal writers who visited her classrooms, to her Aboriginal students, to the classroom experience, and to her own shifting experiences and ideas, she produces interpretations as a "travelling" or "migrant" critic. Her point is clear: although cultural boundaries are flexible and identities are fluid, "the problem of *crossing* cultural boundaries arises because of the *existence* of boundaries." She cites Diana Fuss (among others) on essentialism: "To insist that essentialism is always and everywhere reactionary is, for the constructionist, to buy into essentialism in the very act of making the charge; *it is to act as if essentialism has an essence*." Her point is that essentialism can be used strategically to defend a cultural position from both "sides" of the constructed insider/outsider dichotomy, and that to argue Indigenous writers are essentializing is usually, if not always, a strategic blow for colonialism. Her analysis of unsympatheti-

cally depicted German characters in Aboriginal writings is therefore relevant. German Judy in Lee Maracle's *Ravensong*, Helmut Walking Eagle and Hilda in Emma Warrior's "Compatriots," and Johnny Gebhardt in Richard Wagamese's *A Quality of Light*, among others, are examined to show how the authors use these characters to show the problems with binaristic thinking on the part of Native characters, as well as to demonstrate the need to think across cultures. Eigenbrod demonstrates this complexity as she constantly acknowledges "Aboriginal forms of theorizing (as) different from European-derived modes." Her interpretations of a wide array of literature (which is a source of theory, she notes) is nuanced and engaged.

Laura Smith Groening's *Listening to Old Woman Speak: Natives and alterNatives in Canadian Literature* (McGill-Queen's UP \$27.95) begins with a brief account of the "appropriation debate" that raged from 1988 to 1993 and still simmers. This controversy, in some ways a Canadian version of the US "culture wars," swirled around the idea that it was wrong for Euro-descended Canadian writers to write from the perspective of a minority person or to use Aboriginal stories that one did not have permission to tell. The book's purpose is to look at representations of Aboriginal peoples in a long chronological sweep of writing set in Canada (or what became Canada). Groening uses Frantz Fanon's idea of the Manichean allegory as elaborated by Abdul JanMohamed, arguing that the primary framework used in

colonial writing is a hard binary between Us and Them. She usefully adds the complications of gender to the mix. She finds a difference between the autobiographical writings of women such as Susanna Moodie, who integrate Aboriginal people into the domestic field (often literally), and those of men, who relegate them to the margins. She notes that when the genre shifts to fiction or poetry, representations of the violent or “savage” take over and persist. Groening moves from two early novels, John Richardson’s *Wacousta* (1832) and Frances Brooke’s *The History of Emily Montague* (1769), through the autobiographical writings of Anna Jameson and Susanna Moodie, a range of colonial narratives by men written between 1790 and 1830, including Samuel Strickland (Moodie’s brother), four long poems written between 1828 and the end of the nineteenth century by John Richardson, Joseph Howe, Charles Mair and Archibald Lampman, the poems of Duncan Campbell Scott (who worked for the Department of Indian Affairs from 1879 to 1932, heading it after 1912), and two novels by Rudy Wiebe, *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973) and *A Discovery of Strangers* (1994). She then turns to Métis writers and examines their attitude to what she describes as “post-colonial hybridity.” For them, a “hybrid” identity was a curse because of the racist binary—Lee Maracle, Maria Campbell, and Beatrice Culleton Mosionier all discuss the pain of facing multiple rejections, as neither Native nor white enough. For them, “hybridity is no ideal theoretical construct” and will not be “until hybridity is based on reciprocal merging.” Groening finishes her study with an examination of the reception of Basil Johnston’s *Indian School Days*, noting the problems most reviewers had understanding it as a healing text, either missing the humour or seeing it as a repression of the truth.

Groening’s conclusion begins with words Daniel David Moses wrote in 1991: “The

issue,” he writes, “is one of our common humanity and our particular Native expressions of it. You are not us—and if you would permit us to be human too, you must have the good manners to listen and learn our language and forget about interpretation, even when it appears to be English we’re speaking.” Non-Aboriginal people are ethically compelled, Groening concludes, to follow this advice (thus her title). Her point that interpretation of Aboriginal literatures requires a clear understanding of the power of the constructed binary (and a detailed knowledge of Aboriginal culture, language, and history, I would add) is well taken. However, her argument requires that total clarity be granted to the literature itself. She quotes Basil Johnston: “if you tell a story properly, you don’t need to explain what it means afterwards.” Perhaps this is true if you are speaking to those who understand the conventions, but she also quotes Jeannette Armstrong, who notes “there are so many things that we Indian people understand and take for granted” that when she writes for non-Aboriginal people, she needs to compromise. Apparently Aboriginal literatures do need interpretation, certainly for non-Aboriginal readers and quite likely for many Aboriginal readers too. To ask people to listen or read without interpreting is to ask the impossible. Terry Goldie’s *Fear and Temptation* drew the same conclusion as Groening (albeit in 1989). Gary Boire’s review (published in this journal, #124-25) points out that to ignore Aboriginal writing (and its response to binaristic stereotyping) is “an abnegation of political/literary responsibility.” Not all interpretation is misinterpretation, or why would we read Groening’s excellent interpretations? Both Goldie and Groening are themselves trapped by the Us/Them dichotomy, in that they assume a category so pervasive must be real and permanent. Groening’s political insights are often trenchant and the racism her interpretations expose is chilling; unfortunately,

perhaps overwhelmed by the negativity of what she found, she appears to conclude that cross-cultural understanding is impossible. This is a position that even those writing in the heat of the appropriation controversy, such as Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, refused to take. She ended "Stop Stealing Native Stories" by quoting Maria Campbell, "If you want to write our stories, then be prepared to live with us" and added "And not just for a few months." Indeed, Moses himself in the passages Groening quotes could be assumed to be saying precisely that—respect and time-consuming interaction and study are required for interpretation, which is certainly the path Eigenbrod has followed since 1986. Groening, however, concludes that because Linda Griffiths writes the frame narrative of *The Book of Jessica*, a collaboration with Maria Campbell and Paul Thompson, "Campbell's words [are] subjected to such control it is difficult to believe that even her direct speech represents her authentic voice." She then quotes Campbell speaking to Hartmut Lutz in 1991, "I worked with a non-Native writer and I'll never do it again," as if these were Campbell's final words on all Native-white collaborations. In her chapter on Métis women writers, she says they struggle with "hatred of [their] white identity because whites are the oppressors, and hatred of [their] Native identity because of the way that identity has been constructed as 'other' by society at large." Groening struggles with a similar totalizing definition: all whites are oppressors. Nor does she see the debate as having changed over the past 15 years, although both Eigenbrod and Valaskakis support a less polarized view.

Gail Valaskakis begins her collection *Indian Country: Essays on Contemporary Native Culture* (Wilfrid Laurier UP \$28.95) by noting that "In a discourse that interweaves historical experience and current practice, Natives and other North Americans negotiate the relationships of dominance and

resistance that thread through popular culture." In Lac du Flambeau in Wisconsin, growing up as a Chippewa (also known as Ojibway or Anishnabe) of mixed ancestry, she and her brother became "living boundaries between the city and the reserve, the Chippewa and the outsider." Her "father is a tribal member of the reservation where I was raised; my mother is a non-Indian; my brother is a tribal member and I am not enrolled." The first chapter on the changing fortunes of the place and its inhabitants is filled with complex struggles over tradition, government decrees, blood quanta, tourists, and the distribution of casino funds. Subsequent chapters concern Oka; the conflicts over the repatriation of artifacts from museums; land claims and sacred places; images and Native women; the pow wow in history and popular culture; the disposition of her father's Mide water drum, and the complexities of "being Indian" in the US (based on blood quanta) and Canada (paternity). Illustrated with fascinating images and photographs, Valaskakis' accounts are dense, intensely researched, theoretically sophisticated, and highly personal. The result is impossible to summarize, but tremendously enlightening and interesting to read. In her conclusion she recounts the prophecy of the Seventh Fire, which predicts a time of return to traditional ways—a return granted, in some views, only to Native people. However, "Other Elders say that non-Natives, too, are among those who will recognize the cultural ways that honour the earth and its people. For both the promise that the Seventh Generation will lead us to the Eighth Fire embodies an eternal era of peace and kinship built upon the shared ideology of renewed wisdom and a new relationship among Indians and Others." Her opinion is clear: "We are the Seventh Generation and we are all related." All three works grapple with the nature and future of this fraught relationship in ways that deserve careful attention.

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## 2. Goodbye, Wild Indian

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Renate Eigenbrod

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"Goodbye, Wild Indian" is the title of a poem by Lenore Keeshig-Tobias appearing in the preface to the anthology *Walking A Tightrope: Aboriginal People and Their Representations* edited by Ute Lischke and David T. McNab (Wilfrid Laurier UP \$34.95). Since representation often borders on appropriation and theft of voice, as is seen in the examples of Grey Owl and, maybe, Rudy Wiebe, both discussed in this anthology, the editors chose the right author for their opening. Many readers interested in this book will remember Keeshig-Tobias as the author of the seminal *Globe and Mail* article "Stop Stealing Native Stories." In her "Foreward" to the book, admitting to "having mellowed somewhat" since 1990, she praises the collection of essays by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers as a "meaningful discourse" and "a coming together that brings about necessary healing."

The first section features Aboriginal writers who share reflections on personal experiences—from Drew Hayden Taylor's humorous account of the persistence of "the downtrodden Indian" image that disallows "colour-denied people" to enjoy Native humour, to Phil Belfry's analysis of the use of white images of the "Indian" in corporate logos, to David Newhouse's emphasis on telling Native history from a Native perspective and Mark Dockstator's comments on *The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, which reconciles Aboriginal and Western frameworks of history. In between, following Newhouse's conclusion that if "the story is missing, then our humanity is denied," is a chapter by Tyendinaga scholar Dawn T. Maracle. Her stories of her family close a gap in the history of her nation and also show how the diversity of her family background defies reductive images of Nativeness, or, in this case, "Mohawk-ness." Maracle emphasizes

how stories reflect best the fluidity of one's identity and recognizes that her story about the Mohawk women in her family can never be finished as these women "will continue to live and experience and have stories to tell."

Against this background of personal responses to what Phil Belfry describes as "walking that tightrope between who we really are and who we are perceived to be," the editors have arranged a chapter on historical representations. The middle section again contains a chapter on stories, this time Winona Wheeler's "Reflections on the Social Relations of Indigenous Oral Histories." Together with Dawn Maracle's piece, it can be seen as the book's core contribution to a discourse that counters objectifying and, ultimately, dehumanizing representations. Wheeler's essay highlights alternative ways of doing history, showing how "Cree ways of knowing" acknowledge "the Cree relationship to the past" as "a lived experience embodied in everyday social interaction." The author advocates the opposite approach to Stephen Bocking's findings in his historical overview of "Evolving Perceptions of Indigenous Knowledge," namely that "indigenous knowledge has been routinely reshaped, reified, and detached from its contexts to meet the requirements of dominant institutions." This chapter on historical representations ends with an account of Mi'gmaq oral histories by Dennis and Alice Bartels, which relates to the opening essay by Métis historian Olive Dickason, "The Many Faces of Canada's History," acknowledging different paths in the formation of Canada's history. Karl Hele's contribution, "The Whirlwind of History," on the other hand, is less conciliatory than Dickason's. Illustrating the colonial binary of Western civilization versus Indian savagery with the example of a recorded conversation between two nineteenth century Methodist ministers, non-Aboriginal Thomas Hurlburt and Mississauga Peter Jones, he concludes that "the whirlwind of history continues to stir



up and bring old arguments to the fore. It is up to us, as Aboriginal people, to continue to present our conceptualizations of history to non-Natives.”

The third section of the anthology, titled “Literary and Cinematic Representations,” discusses various twists of exploitation of Native culture and Native peoples, and the resistance to them. The editors of the book, Ute Lischke and David T. McNab, illustrate the ab/use of “the Indian” in Cold War propaganda films in East Germany in the first contribution to this chapter, followed by a discussion by Kathryn Bunn-Marcuse of early documentary films of West Coast Aboriginal ceremonies and a more recent reclaiming of the imagery by filmmakers of that specific nation. The last chapter ends with Janna Korkka’s Bakhtinian reading of Rudy Wiebe’s historical novels *Temptation of Big Bear* and *A Discovery of Strangers* and of his collaborative text *Stolen Life*. She asserts that he is one of those non-Native writers “who show sensitivity to Native peoples and who do not claim “to assume a genuine Native voice”; it is readers and critics that do. Although (or because?) there is much to say against Rudy Wiebe’s representation of Aboriginal peoples in his work, the editors decided to give his construction of “a multitude of points of view” the emphatic position of the book’s conclusion—rather than Bernie Harder’s analysis of Armand Ruffo’s “sensitive examination of the complexity of representation” in his auto/biography of Grey Owl and of other Aboriginal authors “who address those in power and give them the real story.”

Daniel David Moses’ and Terry Goldie’s anthology of Aboriginal literatures, *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English* (3rd ed. Oxford UP \$44.95), showcases the multitude and distinctiveness of Aboriginal voices in Canada; it has become the anthology, a seminal textbook in university (and high school) courses in this field. In each of the three editions, from 1992,

1998, and 2005, the editors emphasize contemporary writing; hence it is in the updating of the recent Aboriginal literature in this country that readers of this anthology see the most important changes. The third edition still contains texts by those authors who laid the twentieth century foundation for this field and who are commonly associated with it. Rita Joe, Basil Johnston, Maria Campbell, Jeannette Armstrong, Beatrice (Culleton) Mosionier, Lee Maracle, Tomson Highway, Ruby Slipperjack, and Thomas King are just some of the “big names” from the first half of the anthology. The book is organized according to the authors’ birth-dates, presumably to make a point about how the history of Native literature is reflected in the different ages of the writers. However, different from the previous editions, the 2005 book no longer indicates the birth-dates right after the authors’ names in the table of contents so that readers doing some browsing outside a classroom setting may wonder about the seemingly random organization of the material. It is only when they get to the text selection itself that they find biographical information and a commentary on the writing in the form of a preface (helpful information that used to be in a “Notes on Contributors” section at the end of the book). Another organizing feature of the anthology is each author’s culture-specific identification as, for example, Métis, Cree, Ojibway (Anishnabe), Mohawk or Inuit given in the table of contents. This emphasis on diversity among Aboriginal writers offsets to some degree the homogenizing effect of the category “Native Literature” used in the title of the book. It also makes it easy to see that Cree (or part Cree) and Ojibway/Anishnabe authors form a noticeable group (so that *An Anthology of Cree Literature in English*, for example, appears to be in reach).

Moses’ and Goldie’s anthology features a cross-section of genres from orature to collaborative, autobiographical and non-fiction

writing to short stories, excerpts from novels, and poetry. The orature section at the beginning of the book contains examples from a wide range of Aboriginal nations and—new in this edition—includes a Haida text by Ghandl translated by celebrated (if controversial) translator and poet Robert Bringhurst. For the fiction, the editors added an excerpt from *Porcupines and China Dolls* by Robert Alexie which is a welcome addition by a well-received new author whose first novel is already out of print. The remaining additions feature—apart from Highway’s play “Aria” (exchanged for an excerpt from the *Rez Sisters*)—new, or only recently published, or not yet that well-known poets: Joan Crate, Sharron Proulx-Turner, Marvin Francis, Joanne Arnott, Randy Lundy, and David Groulx. They complement nicely the more established poets like Louise Halfe, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, Wayne Keon, Daniel David Moses, and Armand Garnet Ruffo, to mention just a few but, all together, also take up a large part of the anthology so that there is almost too much poetry—at least if assessed from the perspective of teaching in an undergraduate university classroom where the inclusion of more prose, also

creative non-fiction, would have been more suitable.

In the new preface to the third edition, preceding the preface to the first one, the two editors reflect in their conversation upon new developments in Aboriginal literatures in Canada, pointing out that the new writers “have less need for resistance but instead can concentrate on consolidation and healing.” Although they admit “that some won’t be healed,” they concur that the younger generation seems to have greater strength to shoulder the legacy of colonialism if only by being able to find “fascinating new vocabularies.” Marvin Francis’ provocative fusion of colonialism, corporate language, and markers of “Nativity” comes to mind:

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Special this day  
mcPemmican™  
cash those icons in  
how about a  
mcTreaty™  
would you like some lies with that?

#### NOTE

- 1 treaty manuscript



**Articles**

Caitlin J. **Charman** completed her undergraduate degree in English at St. Francis Xavier University and her MA at Queen's University. She is currently a doctoral candidate at Queen's University. Her dissertation focuses on the marketing and reception of Atlantic Canadian fiction.

Renate **Eigenbrod** is the author of *Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Im/Migrant Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada* (2005) and has been enjoying teaching and researching Aboriginal literatures since 1986, currently at the Department of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba.

Margery **Fee** currently teaches in the first-year Arts One program at the University of British Columbia, where she also teaches First Nations literatures. Her most recent publication is "Racializing Narratives: Obesity, Diabetes, and the 'Aboriginal' Thrifty Genotype," published in *Social Science and Medicine*.

Andre **Furlani** is Associate Professor of English at Concordia University, Montreal. Recent publications include a chapter on the literary treatment of youth sexuality in *Curiouser: Essays in Pre-Adolescent Sexuality* (U of Minnesota P), and an essay in *Literary Imagination* on the contemporary literary excursus. *Guy Davenport: Postmodern and After* is forthcoming (Northwestern UP), as well as a chapter in *Ronald Johnson: Man and Poet* (National Poetry Foundation).

Daniela **Janes** teaches at the University of Toronto. Her research interests include nineteenth and early twentieth-century industrial writing, Victorian-Canadian literary culture, and historical fiction. Her article on narrating history in Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman Boy* appeared in *Studies in Canadian Literature*.

Jody **Mason** is a senior doctoral candidate and course instructor in the Department of English at the University of Toronto. Mason has also published articles on Bharati Mukherjee, Dionne Brand, and has an essay on the politics of mobility in Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* forthcoming in *Studies in Canadian Literature*.

Gillian **Roberts** is currently Senior Lecturer in English at Leeds Metropolitan University. She completed her PhD on Michael Ondaatje and Carol Shields at the University of Leeds in 2004 and held a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowship in 2005-2006. Her current research focuses on Canadian cultural representations of the Canada-US border.

Sue **Sorensen** teaches at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg and specializes in nineteenth and twentieth century British literature. She has published on Henry James, A.S. Byatt, and literary film adaptations. Current research interests include cinematic representations of modernist artists, and portrayals of clergy in film and literature.

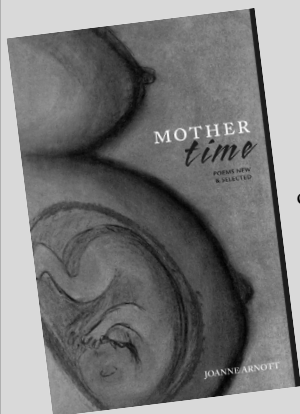
### Poems

Jack **Davis** lives in North Bay, ON. M. Travis **Lane** teaches at the University of New Brunswick. Jim F. **Johnstone** and Nathaniel G. **Moore** live in Toronto. Susan **McCaslin** teaches at Douglas College. James **Pollock** lives in Madison, WI.

### Reviews

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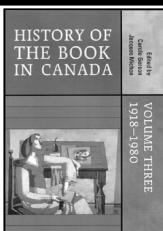
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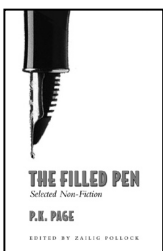
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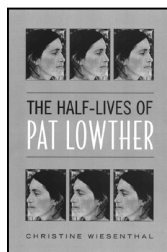
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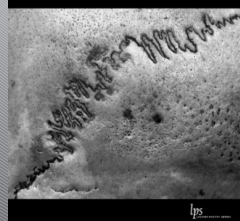
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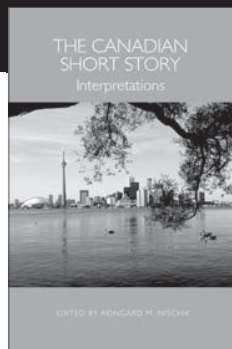
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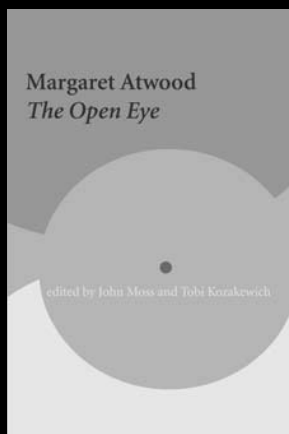
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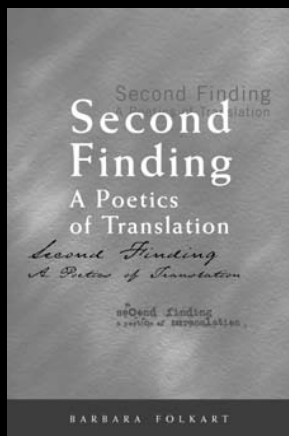
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